TWO MARYLAND GIRLS

AMY E. BLANCHARD

Class _____

Book _____

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT

"O, DARLING SISTER, DON'T CRY"

Two Maryland Girls

BY

AMY E. BLANCHARD

Author of "Thy Friend Dorothy," "A Sweet Little Maid," "A Little Tomboy," etc., etc.

PHILADELPHIA
GEORGE W. JACOBS & CO.
PUBLISHERS

PZ7
.B59
Two
Copy 2

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS,
Two Copies Received
OCT 2 1903
Copyright Entry
July 31-1903
CLASS a XXc. No.
65231
COPY A.

Copyright, 1903, by
GEORGE W. JACOBS & COMPANY

Published, September, 1903.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE.
I.	Where Nona Lived	1
II.	Sylvia's Plot	20
III.	Sylvia Does	37
IV.	Plain Sailing	52
V.	Mrs. Benoni Wilson	69
VI.	Sylvia's News	88
VII.	Changes	108
VIII.	A Place of Peace	126
IX.	Summer Friends	145
X.	Between Two Fires	164
XI.	In Sylvia's Home	183
XII.	Good Times	201
XIII.	Many Diversions	217
XIV.	Sober Facts	235
XV.	An Easter Party	254
XVI.	What the Forest Did	273
XVII.	Nona's Rival	291
XVIII.	Drifting	310
XIX.	Confessions	331
XX.	Trailing Arbutus	353

ILLUSTRATIONS

"O, DARLING SISTER, DON'T CRY" . . . . Frontispiece
"YUH IS SHOLY A CAPACIOUS YOUNG LADY" . . . 22
"MISS NONA, DID YOU EVER SEE THIS BEFORE?" . . 124
"I MUST HAVE A CAP-A" 210
PLAYING HIDE AND SEEK 290

TWO MARYLAND GIRLS

CHAPTER I

WHERE NONA LIVED

It was the quaintest of quaint towns, even at this late day when the rage for improvement seems to necessitate the cutting down of all venerable trees and the turning of smiling gardens into red clay banks. Where Nona lived there was a view of a rose garden from the front porch, an expanse of blue river to be seen from the upper windows on one side, and a glimpse of a winding creek on the other. But for the trees, one might have caught sight of the bay, and a knowledge of its nearness was cause for satisfaction in hot weather; though in winter Nona was glad to forget it.

On a certain cold day she was very content to snuggle down in front of her Franklin stove and neatly pull out the edges of some laces which she

had been carefully cleaning. Every little while she glanced up to watch the coasters making merry upon a long hill in front of the house; but as the short winter's day ended and her last bit of lace was laid aside, she sat with her chin in her hand and her eyes fixed upon the glowing fire which was a more comforting sight than the pale gold of a January sunset.

Her room was old-fashioned in its furnishings; a four-poster bed, a bureau whose high glass swung over two small drawers, a plain wash-stand, a little work-table, and two or three chairs the backs of which were ornamented with gilt fruit and flowers. In the one rocking-chair Nona herself sat, her feet on the stove hearth. Just then she was not in the happiest frame of mind, not because of herself, but on account of Sylvia. Nona was at the age to adore beauty and to entertain a sentimental devotion toward some older girl, and so she made a queen of her pretty sister and idealized her to the extent of making an entirely different person of her, for, during the last two years while Nona had been away at boarding-school, Sylvia had launched

out as a young lady and was now enjoying her freedom as a Maryland belle. She had by no means wasted her time, and her conquests but added to Nona's admiration of her, for who could withstand Sylvia's charms? thought she. It was Sylvia who now aroused Nona from her reverie by gently rattling the knob of the door and then thrusting in her pretty head.

"All alone in the dark, Nona? What a lovely fire, you luxurious creature."

Nona made a little protesting gesture. "It isn't my fault, Sylvia. You know your room is heated from the register, and you vowed you couldn't bother with a fire which might go out some cold night and leave you a chilly room to dress in."

"Oh, well, I don't see how it is that things always turn out all right for you; your fire never goes out; you might have told me how it would be."

"It doesn't go out because I don't let it. If I depended upon Buck to take care of it, I'd have no fire half the time."

"That's very easy to say," returned Sylvia pet-

tishly. "You are so self-righteous, Nona. Of course it is all due to your conscientious attention to it and all that. It must be very pleasant to feel oneself perfection."

Nona bit her lip. If there was anything that was a characteristic of Sylvia, it was self-esteem, but she had begun to learn that there was little use in arguing with illogical Sylvia, and that when she made little sharp remarks it was best to pass them over in silence; so she changed the subject, only saying: "It is a good fire. I am glad you can enjoy it. Sit down here and let us talk. What's the latest?"

Sylvia settled herself upon the home-made ottoman, which served as a shoe-box, and clasped her knees, leaning back thoughtfully. "Louise Snowden wants us to come over to-night and practice for the church concert," she said.

"And we'll go?"

"Yes, I suppose so, though my poor little pipe isn't worth very much."

"I am sure your voice is very sweet, Sylvia."

"Yes, but of course it is you they really want."

Nona gave a little frown; it was one of her

griefs that Sylvia was extremely jealous of her one talent; yet she laughed and said: "If we were going to sing in the dark there might be more reason to say that, but you know you are always the attraction where there are any eyes at all. Who would ever look twice at insignificant little me when you are by?"

"Oh, well," sighed Sylvia, "I'll go, of course. It is to be an Old Folks' Concert, Nona, and we will wear the costumes of a hundred years back."

"Oh, what fun! I am so glad. Won't it be a joke to see the boys all in knee breeches and Revolutionary coats? I wonder how many of those who wear moustaches will be willing to shave them off. What will you wear, Sylvia?"

"I don't know; I thought maybe you could lend me the dress you wore at the tableaux you girls had at school. The gown is a little short, to be sure, but I could loop it up over a petticoat and it would do and I shouldn't have to bother about getting up anything new; you know I hate to do that sort of thing."

Nona compressed her lips. Her thoughts had at once flown to the costume as the one she could

wear herself. "But what shall I wear?" she said.

"Oh, you can easily fix up something; you will have plenty of time. It will not make so much difference what you have on; you are so young, but I want to look my best, because —"

Nona's heart melted within her. "Yes, I know; because — All right, Sylvia, you shall have the dress. I'll hunt up something that will do," she added cheerfully. It always ended that way. Sylvia must have what she wished and must receive the first consideration. Nona had learned to accept that, and gave her sister the rights which she felt must be accorded to superior years as well as to beauty. Even Mrs. Ridgely bowed to Sylvia's decree, and rather than cope with her petulance and unreasoning tirades she allowed her to have her own way in order to keep the peace. She was not their own mother, but had done her duty to them so far as she was able. She was an excellent housekeeper and had given Mr. Ridgely a true affection, although there had never been a great comradeship between herself and his two daughters. To see that they were well-

dressed and that their behavior in company was irreproachable; that they were sent to good schools and that they associated with proper companions constituted the limit of her duty. She was now in the third year of her widowhood, still a young woman and was not at all averse to the idea of a second marriage.

She viewed the girls critically when they came down dressed for their evening with Louise Snowden. "You always do look well, Sylvia," she said approvingly. "So much for having a stylish figure. Dear me, Nona, why won't you learn to wear something suitable around your neck. Those linen collars do very well for the street, but not for evening."

"They are more becoming to me than anything else," returned Nona. "If I had a pretty, round, white throat like Sylvia's I could wear anything, but with my long neck it is very different. Besides it is so cold to-night that I didn't wish to wear anything light."

"You could wear a velvet stock or a white ribbon. Go up and put on something else."

"And don't keep me waiting," added Sylvia.

"You may as well bring down your cloak. I think I shall wear it, it is so nice and warm. Your golf cape will suit you better; you don't mind rumpling your hair and you can put up the hood and keep good and warm."

Nona treasured her pretty cloak, but as Sylvia had given her the material for a Christmas gift, she had nothing to say and obediently brought it when she returned, looking admiringly at Sylvia as she threw it over her shoulders.

The two girls tiptoed along the icy street and turning off through a little alley they reached another street, at one corner of which they stopped before a wide old-fashioned house. As the door opened to their ring a sound of buzzing voices reached their ears and Nona shrank back a little. "There is a crowd," she whispered.

Sylvia looked at her with a smile. "So much the better," she replied.

Louise came forward to meet them with effusion, and they presently found themselves in the center of a merry group. One of the girls pounced upon Nona. "You have to sing a solo," she cried.

"Oh, no," protested Nona. "Have you made out the programme?"

"Not quite; the boys are busy at it now. Come over into the corner and give them some hints. You know more about the old songs than the rest of us. We have been waiting for you."

"Hurry up, Miss Emily, we want Miss Nona over here," cried Graham Waters.

Nona gave a quick glance at her sister. "Come, too," she said softly; but Sylvia shook her head and walked off with Louise. Graham set a chair for Nona and she found herself established at a big table with half a dozen young men and girls, most of whom she knew.

"This is the august committee, Miss Nona," said Graham. "We voted you one of us, for I have not forgotten how you sang 'Phyllis Has Such Charming Graces.'"

Nona blushed. "I feel quite honored," she said. "Who are on the other committees?"

"Miss Louise and your sister and Miss Anna Warfield are the ladies on the costume committee."

"They wanted Mr. Waters," spoke up Emily

Griscom, "but we wouldn't let them have him." She gave the young man a killing glance which Nona inwardly resented. It was quite a question which was the prettier, Emily or Sylvia; and until very lately Graham had been considered Sylvia's special admirer. That he should go over to Emily's side was not to be tolerated. Nona wondered a little why he should have been selected to serve upon the programme committee. He had a mild, flavorless tenor voice, neither sweet nor strong, and was prouder of it than of his more valuable accomplishments. His great desire was to sing in public and he was eager to be set down as a soloist.

"Don't you think Miss Nona and I could sing a duet?" he asked.

"You could," spoke up Joe Marriott, "but it would be like a jewsharp and a trombone."

Graham colored. "You're polite to Miss Nona," he said. "I would rather compare her voice to a violin than to a jewsharp."

"I beg pardon, Miss Nona," said Joe. "I didn't mean that the way it sounded. The jewsharp wasn't meant to apply to you, but Gra-

ham's little pipe with your lovely contralto did seem incongruous. Now, I think a duet sung by Miss Nona and Ran Harwood would be something worth while. By the way, why isn't Ran on this committee? Where is he?"

Emily glanced across the room; her eyes met Graham's and she laughed. "Randolph is evidently more agreeably occupied," she said.

Nona followed her glance and saw that Sylvia and Mr. Harwood were deep in a most absorbing conversation, Sylvia using her eyes and making pretty little gestures with all the coquetry of which she was capable. Graham looked down with a frown while blundering Joe Marriott arose and crossed the room. "See here, Ran," he said, "we didn't come here to make love to the girls. We want you on the programme committee. You have to sing a duet with Nona Ridgely. Come along. You can spare him, Miss Sylvia. I'll send Graham over to take his place."

Sylvia gave her head a toss. "Of course I can spare Mr. Harwood if he wishes to go; we can continue our conversation some other time and you needn't give yourself the trouble to send Mr.

Waters here. I will look up that book on costumes, Mr. Harwood, and we will renew this discussion when it is more convenient to us both." And with her haughtiest air she walked away to join a group of girls who were chattering over a book of old fashion plates.

"Now you've done it," said Randolph in an undertone. "Don't you know, you blundering idiot, that Graham has transferred his allegiance to Miss Emily Griscom?"

"Great Caesar! no. I'm always putting my foot in it. I thought Bennett Duvall was her special adorer."

"You know Bennett," returned Randolph; "he is too everlastingly bashful to assert himself and he'll step aside every time."

"Why don't you prod him?" queried Joe. "You are his best friend; you two have been chums since you were babies."

"Very true, but that doesn't put self-assertion into a man who is shy, and well —"

"You're a fine pair," called Emily across the room. "What are you standing there whispering about? Come right here, both of you. It's

as much as one's life is worth to get a crowd like this to come down to business. What have you decided, Mr. Marriott? You are chairman of this committee. Is it Graham Waters or Mr. Harwood who is to sing with Nona?"

"Oh, don't count me in," said Graham, stiffly. "I think I will be of more use in some other direction. It was a mistake to have placed me on this committee, it seems. I will resign," he added with much dignity.

"Please, don't," whispered Emily. Then louder, "I propose that we sing a quartette, Mr. Marriott. Graham can take the tenor, you the bass, Louie Snowden the alto and yours most truly the soprano; then we can vote upon the duet." She smiled beguilingly at Graham as she spoke and he succumbed, while Joe himself was not indifferent to the fact that she had included him in the arrangement. And then they went diligently to work selecting, rejecting, and arguing, and finally it was decided that Nona should sing "Within a Mile of Edinboro' Town" and a duet with Randolph Harwood which they were to choose for themselves, that the quartette

should sing "Who Shall Deserve the Glowing Praise," and that the rousing old "Strike the Cymbals" should be given by all in concert. There were other solos and various arrangements still to be decided upon, but they had worked hard enough for one night, they decided, and there were sufficient songs selected to begin to practice and they decided to adjourn.

Nona did not know how Sylvia would like the knowledge that her sister had been chosen for so many numbers of the programme, and she herself shrank from being made conspicuous, but Emily assured her that it was her duty, that it was for a good cause and that she must not hide her talents, so she felt that she must accept the situation with as good grace as possible.

"We shall have to practice this together," said Randolph Harwood to her, looking over a piece of music in his hand. "Are your evenings very much taken up?"

"No," returned Nona doubtfully. Sylvia usually considered that she had a pre-empted claim upon the parlor and the piano, but she could not say so.

"The afternoon about five, are you at leisure then?" inquired Randolph.

"Yes," returned Nona relieved, "but sometimes you might rather take the evening for it —" she was about to add, "I don't think Sylvia will mind," but she remembered that Mr. Harwood seemed to admire Sylvia and she stopped short in confusion.

"I will come to-morrow at five then," her companion went on, "and I will bring some duets to look over; then we can arrange the next hour for practice. Did you come alone? May I see you home?"

"We came alone, yes; and, thank you, we shall be very glad of your escort." She glanced across the room to see if Sylvia were still there, and discovered that her sister had haughtily refused the proffered company of any young man who had wished to walk home with her, for Sylvia was in one of her very high and mighty moods, Nona saw. She wondered whether she had done right to say that they would be glad of Mr. Harwood's escort, for perhaps Sylvia wouldn't. Randolph had smiled at the "we" but accepted

the position assigned him when the two sisters appeared ready for the homeward walk, Sylvia very bewitching in the pretty evening cloak and Nona looking like a little gnome, her serious face peeping out from the long pointed hood of her golf cape. After they had fairly started Sylvia's ill-humor left her and it was she who monopolized the conversation, for she never doubted for a moment that it was on her account that Mr. Harwood had desired to walk home with them, and she thought him rather clever to take the way he did of accomplishing it. Yet it was to Nona that his last words were given: "To-morrow at five."

"What did he mean?" asked Sylvia as the door closed behind them.

"Oh, he's going to practice a duet with me."

"A duet?"

"Yes."

Sylvia was silent for a moment, and then she asked: "Why didn't you have him come in the evening?"

"I didn't know — I thought maybe you wouldn't like us to be practicing in the parlor when you might have company."

"You goose," cried Sylvia. "Couldn't you see that he wanted a chance to come to the house to see me?"

"Oh," said Nona.

"And I hope you'll tell him to come in the evening next time. You won't be long over your singing and then you needn't stay down if you don't want to. He is rather difficult, and, being a newcomer, of course he doesn't feel as much at home with us as the others whom we have known nearly all our lives. I didn't suppose," she added, "that he cared much for girls; he visits at very few houses for he is a great student, and, I declare, it's quite a feather in my cap to have attracted him. Oh, Nona, we're going to have the loveliest costumes. I will tell you all about them tomorrow. What else are they going to sing?"

Nona drew from her pocket a rough draft of the programme, so far as it was complete. They were warming themselves in the parlor before going to their rooms.

Sylvia ran her eye over the sheet. "Goodness!" she cried. "Are you going to sing all those? You must like to be conspicuous."

"That's what I was afraid of being," returned Nona eagerly, "but they all insisted and voted me down, and I couldn't help myself."

"You could have refused absolutely."

"Do you think I'd better? Is it too late?" asked Nona anxiously.

But Sylvia did not heed; she was still scanning the sheet. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "why did you allow Emily Griscom to have this quartette with Graham in it? I think you are very mean to care so little for my interests."

"I couldn't help it," returned Nona helplessly. "She just would, you know. Everybody else was satisfied and my weak little no would not have done a bit of good."

Sylvia tapped her foot impatiently. "Come, let's go to bed," she said. "I wish they'd never thought of the horrid old concert. It's just like Emily Griscom to propose something that would put me in the background and bring her forward."

"Oh, Sylvia, I don't believe she thought of that."

"Much you know about it. Don't talk to me.

Here, take your cloak." She tossed the wrap to Nona and ran swiftly up-stairs, leaving Nona to put out the lights and to grope her way to her own room, feeling more hurt and indignant than she was willing to admit.

CHAPTER II

SYLVIA'S PLOT

But the next morning Sylvia was all smiles. She was really very fond of Nona, and except that she was such a spoiled, illogical, unreasonable creature, was a very winsome somebody. She had little affectionate, appealing ways which always won Nona over in spite of her feeling that she had a right to be angry.

Nona was laughing merrily when her sister appeared in the dining-room. "What is the joke?" asked Sylvia settling herself at the table.

"Old Peter Smith is dead."

"I don't see anything very funny in that."

"No, not in the event, but in the fact of the ruling passion strong in death."

Sylvia looked up. "You mean —"

"He was such an old miser, you know, and would not pay anyone to nurse him, even in his

last extremity, but a neighbor, whose good heart could not see the lonely old man suffer from want of attention, went there and did what he could for the old fellow. It seems that this neighbor thought it would be well, for sanitary reasons, to change Peter's shirt, but the old man objected, saying there was no need of it, for if he lived it would be an additional expense to have the other laundered, and if he died he'd have to have a clean one anyhow, so what was the use of such extravagance?"

Sylvia laughed. "That is a good story. Who told you?"

"Mammy True, of course. She is our gossip, you know."

"Where is mamma?" asked Sylvia, sipping her coffee daintily.

"She has gone into the sitting-room to read her letters. Do you know, Sylvia, I shouldn't be surprised—" Nona paused.

"If what?" asked her sister.

"If mamma were to marry again. I sometimes think she will."

Sylvia pushed back her plate and arose with a

flushed face. "I'd like to see me stay here then. If it comes to that, I'll marry, too."

"Whom?"

"Anybody. You don't suppose I shall have any difficulty in having a number to choose from?"

"You don't mean all that," said Nona, putting an affectionate arm around her. "Have you looked at your mail?"

"No."

"Then let us see what pleasant prospect it brings. You almost always have something nice in your mail."

Sylvia picked up her letters and glanced over their contents. "Anna Warfield would like us to come to tea this evening."

"That is good. I like Anna."

"Two or three of the boys will come after tea, Anna says; I wonder who."

"We'll find out when we get there. After all, Sylvia, you see it is as well that I arranged to have Mr. Harwood come at five."

"Oh, you're thinking of that, are you?" Sylvia looked at her suspiciously. "Perhaps he'll be there, though I don't believe he will."

"YUH IS SHOLY A CAPACIOUS YOUNG LADY"

"Graham will be, of course."

"And Emily Griscom, of course."

"Then you must look your best," said Nona with a wise nod. "I promised to make Mammy True some iron-holders. She 'ain't got the disappearance of one,' she says."

"Wait a minute," said Sylvia. "If Mr. Harwood comes at five and Anna has tea at half-past six, we'd better get ready early or we'll have no time. Don't forget. It is so like you not to think of those things."

"I'll remember." And Nona went to rummage among the bundles of pieces in the garret to find material for her iron-holders. It was this sort of work which fell to her, for Sylvia was not much of a seamstress when it came to homely matters, and Mammy True usually went to Nona when towels were to be hemmed or holders to be made.

"Umph-umph, you is sholy a capacious young lady," said Mammy when Nona appeared that afternoon with the iron-holders.

Nona laughed. "Why, Mammy, I'm not very big."

"Who say yuh big? I ain't say yuh is. I say yuh capacious an' yuh is dat, jes capacious to do anythin' yuh lays yo han' to. Now, Miss Sylvy, she ain' capacious, 'tall, 'cep to draw de young gemmans. Don' let huh cut yuh out, honey, when Mr. Right come erlong."

"I'm afraid I'll have a poor chance."

"No, yuh won', uh-uh," returned Mammy. "Yuh has yo good p'ints same as Miss Sylvy. She lak one o' dese yer big roses what ain' got much sweet rosy smell to 'em, an' yuh is lak de little pinky ones dat smell so sweet dey fills de whole house wid dey odum-scent; das what."

"That is a very poetical compliment, Mammy."

"Hit may be po', honey, but hit de gorspel truf. Yuh has yo gre't big grey eyes dat speaks hones' an' true all de time, an' Miss Sylvy has de die away kin' dat she look up with lak she say: 'I so leany ovah an' helpless; I want a prop', an' all de young gemmans dey comes an' dey says: 'Hyah a shouldah an' a ahm what yuh kin have,' an' den she smile so sweet an' sof' an' look up lak she so obligated to 'em, an' dat teks de young

mens. Sho', child, ef yuh wants to git a string o' beaux yuh just bleedged ter pertend yuh wants 'em, an' that yuh cyarnt stan' up straight withouten 'em, an' dey comes a runnin'."

"I don't believe I wish that kind," said Nona, with a little independent gesture. "If I can't attract them without being something I'm not, I don't believe I'll try. All those pretty little ways are natural to Miss Sylvia and they are not to me."

"Tain't uvverbody thinks 'em purty. Dey is some folkses dat laks dem little pinky roses I done tole yuh 'bout. Yuh go 'long, chile; wid dem big grey eyes an' dat little slim figger, an' dat se'ious face dat look lak sunshine when you smiles an' shows dem white toofs, yuh ain' gwine be lef' settin'. I say hit."

Nona gave her a hug. "It's something to have one appreciative friend," she said, "but you mustn't make me vain."

"I ain' gwine mek yuh vain; yuh needs a little ob dat ve'y identicous thing; yuh hyar me."

Hearing Sylvia call, Nona ran up to find her sister established before her fire. "It is so much

more cheerful in here than in my room," she began, "and I should like to talk to you, Nona. I have hardly seen you all day."

"But you were out all morning."

"I know, but where were you when I called?"

"Talking to Mammy True. I went down to take her the holders I have been making."

"Why didn't you let Ginny take them? I believe you would rather talk to Mammy than to any one in the house."

"I do like to talk to her, for I love her dearly."

"And you're her pet; it's easy to see. You always were."

Nona made no response to this and the two sat for a few minutes in silence, then Sylvia broke out with: "Emily Griscom is as mean as she can be. I wish she were in Jericho."

Nona turned her earnest eyes upon her sister. "Do you mean there is anything else?"

"Yes, I mean she is doing everything to fascinate Graham and I know she doesn't love him as I do; she doesn't love him at all. She is just trying to make Bennett jealous; she told me so. I believe she is really fond of Bennett."

"And is she succeeding?"

"I don't know. Bennett is so shy and so queer; if he thinks she likes Graham best he will step aside and let him go in and win, yet all the time I know he adores Emily and if he could propose to her by proxy, or if she would propose to him he would be delighted."

"If it were only leap year now, we could get up a leap-year party."

"Oh, shocking! Of course Emily would die before she would let him know, but he may go on this way forever and she might wait for him till doomsday, for I don't see that he is any nearer proposing to her than he was two years ago. Oh, dear, dear, if there were only some way to settle it."

"I think Graham is detestable," said Nona with some heat. "Why don't you turn your thoughts to some one else, Sylvia? I am sure there are scores of young men waiting for a smile from you."

"But I don't want any of them, and Graham isn't detestable; he is only — only — trying to pay me back — at least that is the way it began.

Because I flirted a little with Randolph Harwood he is doing this."

"Then why do you care? It will come all right."

"No, it won't, it won't, because Emily has so many wiles and every day I can see more and more the effect of them on Graham. No, it will end in his heart being captured as his fancy is now."

"And meanwhile you will flirt with Mr. Harwood?"

"Yes, of course. Do you suppose I mean to be left in the lurch?"

"And Mr. Harwood?"

"He can take care of himself. He is not susceptible, I assure you, and he understands, or, at least, he ought to. If only some one would suggest a way to make Bennett propose to Emily it would all come right and everybody would be happy." She gave a long sigh and was silent for a little.

Nona leaned over and patted her hand gently. "Emily isn't half as pretty as you," she said. "I don't see what people see to admire in her when you are by."

"But they do admire her. She has a way."

"Anne Hathaway," said Nona softly to herself.

Sylvia stared. "What are you saying?"

"Nothing. I was only thinking of Shakespeare."

"That is just like you. I should think your own sister's troubles were of more importance."

"Sylvia, dear, they are important." Nona leaned over to kiss her cheek.

"Then help me."

"With all my heart. What can I do?"

"Don't ask me. Think of something. I have racked my brain till it whirls. I have actually lain awake nights thinking about it, and last night I cried myself to sleep."

"Really, Sylvia?"

"Yes, I did."

This was a state of affairs quite appalling to Nona who had not yet arrived at a true appreciation of the seriousness of a love affair. She shook her head. "You mustn't do that again. Let me think what I can do. I might try to win Graham from Emily and then hand him over to you. How does one do those things? I will watch Emily and see."

"Nonsense, you are a goose. As if you could."

"No, I am sure that wouldn't work. I might propose to Bennett by proxy or get him in a corner where he couldn't get away and then bring him to terms, or I might write a letter to Emily purporting to come from Bennett and he would be so glad when she answered yes that he would thank me for it."

"Oh, Nona, do you mean it?" Sylvia sat up very straight, her eyes shining. "That could be done."

"Of course it could, but it would be dreadful; it would actually be forgery."

"But the end would justify the means. Please do it."

Nona shook her head. "Couldn't, my dear. I am not clever enough at imitating hand-writing, even if my conscience approved. If I knew Mr. Bennett Duvall very well I could talk to him, and I would do it, but he is so shy, as you say, and a little stern, and I'd be scared out of my wits, besides he would very likely tell me politely not to concern myself about his affairs. Now Graham —"

Sylvia seemed to catch only the last words. "What of Graham?"

"I might maliciously say evil things of Emily to him; break the ninth commandment to bits."

Sylvia shook her head. "You wouldn't do that, Nona, and I would not have you. The other would be much better, for it would harm no one. I can't agree with you that it would be so dreadful. It would be much less dreadful than to break my heart." And she suddenly burst into tears.

In an instant Nona was on her knees beside her. "Oh, darling sister, don't cry. I would do anything in reason, you know I would, but I shouldn't know how to do that, and I couldn't bring myself to such a piece of deception, even for you, much as I love you."

"Oh, no; of course you never do wrong," sobbed Sylvia. "I would do wrong for you or for any one I loved."

"But I shouldn't wish you to."

"No, you are a saint, I know."

"I'm not a saint; far from it, and I don't even look like an angel as you do. There, don't cry,

dearest; it will make your eyes all red and swollen for to-night, and you must look your prettiest." And at last by dint of coaxing and flattering Sylvia was soothed, though she still protested that she could not see any wrong in making three persons happy at the expense of a little deception. Her persistence upon this point at last roused Nona's anger and she snapped out: "Why don't you do it yourself, then?"

Sylvia sprang to her feet. "I will; I vow I will," she exclaimed and fled from the room.

Nona turned again to her fire after listening to Sylvia's departing footsteps. "Will she really do it?" she said to herself. "Oh dear, oh dear, and it will be my fault, for I put the idea into her head, although it was only a joke, I thought. She mustn't; she must not; it would be dreadful. I must go and beg her not to." She arose and went to Sylvia's door. It was locked against her.

"Let me in, Sylvia," whispered Nona. "It is I, Nona." There was dead silence for a moment and then the door was opened. Sylvia's was a pretty room furnished in old mahogany. A red

carpet was on the floor and warm curtains of the same color hung at the windows. A handsome lamp stood lighted upon an old desk which was littered with papers. Sylvia stood in silence, but there was a stubborn set to her mouth.

Nona went up to her and put her arms around her. "You won't do it," she whispered.

Sylvia unclasped her sister's arms. "My happiness is of so little worth to you that you urge me to give it up when I would gain my heart's desire by a few written words that would harm no one. I believe you are in love with Graham yourself."

Nona flushed up. "Oh, Sylvia!"

"Well, you suggested that you might try to win him from Emily. I suppose you must have had some reason to suppose you could."

"Oh, Sylvia!" repeated Nona helplessly. "I was only in fun. The whole thing was only a joke."

"I don't see how you could joke when you knew I was so unhappy and so in earnest."

"I thought I would try to be funny so you wouldn't take it so seriously. Do forgive me, Sylvia."

"Oh, I forgive you," Sylvia returned with a gesture which suggested that she was aware of her magnanimity.

"But you won't do that dreadful thing."

"I shall do as I think best. I am not going to allow a younger sister to dictate to me as to what I shall or shall not do."

"But won't you ask mamma about it?"

"Indeed I shall not, and if you dare to tell her of our conversation, or tell anyone at all, Nona Ridgely, I will never forgive you, and when I die of a broken heart you will be haunted by my misery the rest of your life."

This was too terrible a prospect for Nona to contemplate for a moment and she replied eagerly: "I promise, Sylvia. I will never tell a soul."

"It isn't every girl who takes her younger sister into her confidence," Sylvia went on reproachfully. "Most girls make confidantes of girls of their own age."

"But they ought not to keep things from their mother," said Nona steadily.

"*Little* girls ought not to, maybe, but girls of my age do not like their elders to know the

secrets of their inmost hearts, for they cannot always understand them. It is a very, very great compliment for a girl to tell her sister about her love affairs as I tell you about mine."

"Oh, I know that," returned Nona contritely. "You are very, very sweet to do it, and I am so interested; you know that, Sylvia. Of course I know you have a right to keep your own secrets and I ought not to tell them, and I never, never will; but my own —"

"If you ever have any."

"Yes, if I ever have any," repeated Nona meekly. "I can tell those if I wish to, can't I?"

"Oh, I suppose so, but if this were our own mother it would be different, though since she is only our father's second wife and our step-mother, you are under no obligation that I see."

"But she has been the same as our own mother, and since father died no one could have been kinder or more considerate."

"Of course; she is all that. I am very fond of her, but I don't feel that I have to go to her with my secrets. I know just how she would laugh at them. You see you don't know her as I do,

for you have been away at school ever since father's death, and a girl of seventeen has not the judgment of a girl who has been out in the world for two years; it would be impossible for her to be as experienced." The two years between the two sisters extended to a mighty space of time as Sylvia spoke.

"Yes, I know all that," returned Nona humbly.

"And of course," Sylvia went on, "as long as my experience and judgment are better than yours it would be as well if you did not presume to question them. You have never had a love affair and you don't know that all is fair in love and war."

"Oh, yes, I know that; at least I have heard it," Nona corrected herself. "I don't mean to be disagreeable and pompous and all that, but I can't see things quite as you do; perhaps I shall when I am older and have been out among people more. Don't let's quarrel about it, I am so miserable when we have quarreled. Don't let us say any more about it. Kiss me and then I will go and get dressed."

Sylvia kissed her amiably enough and the point at issue was dropped.

CHAPTER III

SYLVIA DOES

Nona was not long in making her toilet, for she realized that it was nearing five o'clock and that Mr. Harwood would soon appear. She stopped in her sister's room to see if she, too, were ready, but she found her again absorbed in rummaging through her papers. "Not dressed yet," said the younger girl.

"There's plenty of time," said Sylvia, glancing at her clock. "I have something I wish to do first, and the darkness is deceptive for the days are so short. I can easily dress in an hour and it is not quite five yet."

"But Mr. Harwood will soon be here."

"Well, what of that? He is coming to practice with you, isn't he?" Sylvia spoke pleasantly and Nona felt that peace was really established. She was always ready to give her sister all homage when she was in this mood.

"Can't I help you to clear up those papers," Nona offered.

"No, I haven't finished looking through them. I ought to have a note somewhere from Bennett Duvall," she added thoughtfully.

"Oh!" Nona started back.

"What's the matter?" said Sylvia sharply. "Allow me to attend to my own affairs. There, silly, you are a prudish old Puritan; I am not going to commit a crime." She fumbled over her letters and at last thrust them all into a drawer and stood thoughtfully looking out of the window while Nona who had picked up a little book was absorbed in reading the poetry scattered through its pages.

"What a lot of pretty verses you have," exclaimed the younger girl. "I think it is nice to have a scrap-book like this. I have one, but most of my poems are cut out of magazines and newspapers. I think it is a good plan to include original ones also. The girls at school wrote a lot of jingles and I have those and a few that I have added since I came home. How very sentimental this is; it is signed 'Gray.' So many

of yours have that signature. Oh, I see, they are all Graham's. I didn't know he could write such good verses. He must have meant what he wrote or he couldn't have done it so well."

"He meant it then, but I am afraid he doesn't now," said Sylvia gloomily.

"If he meant them once, why not now? I should think he would have to."

Sylvia smiled with superiority. "Ah, my child,

> 'Men were deceivers ever,
> One foot on sea and one on shore,
> To one thing constant never.'"

"That is Byron, isn't it? I should love to read Byron, but Miss Channing warned us against his poetry, and I promised her I wouldn't read it."

"Oh, of course, it would not do for a girl as young as you, but when you have reached my age it is different."

"Are all men deceivers?"

"Most of them are, you innocent child, but I hope your young life will never be blighted as mine has been." Sylvia spoke tragically. Nona gazed at her with admiring eyes while she cast sentimental looks aloft and sighed deeply. "You

look exactly like a heroine," said Nona. "You have the golden hair and the violet eyes and the fair skin that the lovely ladies in novels have, and it is just like a heroine to speak of your blighted life. Does it feel very dreadful to be blighted, Sylvia?" she questioned curiously.

"It is torture," replied Sylvia with intensity.

Nona returned to the scrap-book. "Why, it was only a week ago that 'Gray' wrote one of these, Sylvia. I don't believe a man could be so fickle as to change his feelings in such a very, very short time. How nice it is to have a name like his that one can use so it conceals one's identity and yet that is a part of one's own name. I wish I could do that."

"You might sign yourself Bee," suggested Sylvia.

"Oh, no." Nona flushed up. "I wouldn't for the world. Some one might guess what a terrible name I have. Nona isn't bad, though it is silly enough and reminds one of a cipher, but Benona, it sounds like, oh, I don't know what. If I had only been named for my grandmother instead of my grandfather, it would be all right.

I don't mind Lucretia so much, but Benoni is a horrid name and to think a girl has to have it made into Benona. Oh dear, I am always so afraid some one will find it out. I never let one of the girls at school know, and I hope I can always keep people from knowing it. Don't you ever tell, Sylvia."

"Not if you keep my secrets."

"Oh, I will. I certainly will."

"Remember, if you tell, why, I will tell."

"I promised. You know I did."

"Very well, though after all it is not of so much consequence as you would have it. Let me see what you are looking at."

"This poetry that Graham wrote. How nicely he does that script. I never can make the letters even and nice when I try it. He didn't do it half so well in my book; he only wrote in his every-day style."

"Did he? I forgot what it was he wrote. Go get your book and let me see."

Nona ran obediently to her room and returned with her little scrap-book which, though not as large and well-filled as her sister's, was greatly

treasured. She handed the book to Sylvia and sat down again.

Her sister turned over the pages slowly and at last with a start glanced quickly at Nona, who had taken up the other book and was absorbed in its contents. Sylvia dropped her eyes upon the page before her and after turning a leaf said, "What a nice little poem, so sensible. I'd like to copy it."

"Which is that?" Nona arose to look over her sister's shoulder.

"This." And Sylvia pointed to the page before her.

"I will copy it for you."

"Oh no, I won't trouble you, besides your hand-writing is still unformed and I must have the neatest and most exact copy, if this is to go in my book. Just leave the book with me, Nona; there's a good girl. I'd like to look over it and read all your verses."

"Certainly, I'll leave it, but I don't suppose you will care for school-girl doggerel."

"Some of it is not half bad. I will take care of the book, never fear. I've not time to finish

it now. I will take it at my leisure. Dear me, see how late it is. I must be getting dressed, and you will have to go down in a minute for I think Mr. Harwood will be prompt."

"What shall you wear?" asked Nona, always more interested in her sister's toilets than in her own.

"My green silk, I think."

"Oh, yes, it is not too light for this cold weather and it is so becoming to you. You ought to have a flower to wear in your hair, a fresh rose, for instance."

"They don't happen to grow in January. I am afraid our garden will produce nothing better than a leaf of ivy."

"You shall have my white geranium," said Nona generously. "You must look your best to-night."

"Oh, thank you," said Sylvia, delightedly, "and I will lend you my new chain, if you care to have it."

"Oh, I should," returned Nona. "Thank you, Sylvia. I know you will outshine Miss Emily to-night and then we will see." She

gave her sister a reassuring nod and left the room bearing the coveted chain. A moment later Sylvia heard a ring at the door and then Nona's light tread upon the stair. Then she sat down to her desk and turning over the leaves of Nona's scrap-book she gazed absorbedly at one of the pages. After a little while she began slowly and carefully to copy the verses inserted, studying each letter intently and becoming so absorbed in her occupation that she did not heed the time nor notice the sound of singing which came floating up from below, Nona's pure contralto and Randolph Harwood's rich baritone. At last Sylvia threw down her pen and glanced nervously at the clock. She thrust the book under some papers and began her preparations to dress. In a few minutes she heard the front door close and then Nona's foot-fall upon the stair. Her sister paused at her door before going on to her own room.

"Ready, Sylvia?" came the query. "Why didn't you come down? May I come in?"

Sylvia unlocked the door. "I became interested in something I was doing," she said, "and

have been dreadfully sawny, as Mammy would say, about getting dressed, but I will be ready in a minute. How did the music go?"

"Fairly well, but we shall need a lot of practice yet."

"Of course; that must be expected. Get out my dress, Nona, there's a dear, and, oh yes, what was I to wear in my hair?"

"A bit of my white geranium. I'll go and get it." She laid Sylvia's gown across the foot of the bed and went into her own room, returning soon with the flower which she fastened in Sylvia's locks. "There," she said, "that looks lovely. Now come, are you all ready? I am afraid we shall be dreadfully late." And they started off, Sylvia conscious that she was looking her best, and Nona very proud of her pretty sister.

All went well enough during the evening, for after the young men arrived on the scene Graham divided his attentions between the rival beauties, and Sylvia felt that her star was again in the ascendant, but her spirits fell as she saw Emily

walk off with the young man and she was left to accept another escort home.

She did not tarry as usual to talk over matters with Nona, but saying it was late and that she was tired, she went directly to her room. Throwing aside her wraps she again seated herself at her desk. "It gets more and more desperate," she said to herself, "and I must not let this opportunity slip or it will be too late. Oh no, it can't be wicked, it cannot be. I know Emily does not care for Graham and why should he be made unhappy, as he may be if this keeps up. I cannot think it is wrong, and — even if it were, I should do it."

For an hour or more her fair head bent over her desk and at last she lifted it with a sigh of satisfaction, as she contemplated a paper on which she had been writing. "It is exactly like; no one could tell the two apart. Now for the last act." She sat with her hands supporting her throbbing temples. Emotion had made her quite pale; the white geranium hung limply from her golden hair, the soft, rich folds of her dress trailed out upon the dull red carpet. She was

truly very lovely and her pensiveness made her more so. At last she roused herself from her reverie and drew a sheet of paper toward her. "This will not do," she murmured; "it is too feminine, yet perhaps — ah, how fortunate!" for lifting Nona's scrap-book a plainer sheet of paper fell from it. She turned the leaves of the book and presently began to write, constantly referring to the page before her. Her hand trembled as she folded the sheet and she paused before she wrote the address: "Miss Emily Griscom." "I must find an excuse to mail this myself," she said. She tapped her desk thoughtfully and then drew another sheet before her; upon this she wrote a short note which she slipped into an envelope and addressed it as she had done the first. Then clasping her two hands behind her head she leaned back and gave a long sigh. "I shall know by this time day after to-morrow, and she will never suspect."

The clock struck two and she started up. "I had no idea I had been so long," she exclaimed. "I hope no one passing has discovered my bright light and will comment on it before the family.

That is the trouble with living in a little town; every one knows all your affairs and feels perfectly free to make remarks. Oh, if I but dared to go out to-night and mail this! but it will have to wait. I will mail it myself first thing in the morning."

With this decision she went to bed, but slept fitfully and was awake and down stairs before Nona appeared.

"Early bird! Early bird!" cried the latter as she came down to find Sylvia reading the morning paper. "What got you up so early?"

"Oh, I was awake, and I promised Louie Snowden that I would come over there and talk over the costumes this morning, and I have several things to do before I go."

This satisfied Nona, but she would not have been in so serene a frame of mind if she had seen Sylvia slip her two notes into the box at the post-office on her way to Louie Snowden's. Sylvia herself felt a great relief when the letters were fairly out of sight, but she received a shock and felt distinctly uneasy when Louie innocently remarked: "Bennett Duvall went up to Wash-

ington this morning. I wonder how he would feel to come back and find Emily engaged."

Sylvia felt the blood leave her face and her heart almost stopped beating, but she found voice to ask: "When did Bennett go? and how long does he expect to stay?"

"He took the early train," Louise told her, "and he will not be back till the last of the week."

Till the last of the week! How much could happen in those few days. Oh, why had Sylvia not known? and how strange Emily would think it that Bennett should have written to her upon the eve of an absence. Sylvia was so distrait, and so nervously anxious that she could not put her mind upon the subject that the girls were discussing with such lively interest, and after a little while she pleaded a headache and left her friends to settle matters without her.

All the way home her thoughts were busy over the precariousness of the situation. Suppose Emily had become fond of Graham and should after all refuse Bennett, what a dreadful situation! Then it would come out that some one else had written the letter. Or suppose Bennett

himself should feel that he could not sail under false colors and should tell Emily that it was a forgery — yes, that was what it really was, a forgery, and she, Sylvia Ridgely, had done a very, very wrong thing. She had been blinded by her own interests and now if it should be found out what would become of her. "Oh, why did I do it? why did I do it?" she whispered to herself. "Oh, if I could only get it back. I shall die of suspense before Bennett comes back. How indignant he would be to be refused by a girl to whom he had never offered himself, and how puzzled and mortified Emily would be if he told her." Sylvia told no untruth when she complained of a headache as an excuse for absenting herself from the dinner table. She threw herself on her bed in a state of abject misery, scarcely noticing her sister as she came in to darken the room, and to Nona's "Can I do anything for you? do you wish me to stay with you?" her answer was: "No, I shall be better off alone. If I can get to sleep it will be the best thing for me." So Nona tiptoed out and Sylvia was left to herself. But

sleep was impossible, for over and over the same round of thought continued, until the girl felt that she would go crazy if she could not change its tenor. All the appalling possibilities which lay in the situation arose before her, and as time wore away she settled herself to the fact that she must face a *dénouement* which might embrace the engagement of Graham to Emily, Bennett's indignant anger and her own humiliation.

CHAPTER IV

PLAIN SAILING

Just as she felt that she could not endure for another moment to be alone with these besetting thoughts, Sylvia heard Nona's gentle tap at the door and to her sister's faint "Come in," the younger girl entered.

"How are you, poor dear thing? I hope your head is better. Can you see Emily Griscom, or do you feel too ill? She wishes specially to see you and said I wouldn't do at all. So I came to see if you could stand such an exciting thing as an interview with your rival." She spoke half in jest, but there was solicitude, as well, in her tones.

Sylvia sat up with flushed cheeks, her hands clenched under the coverlet. "I'll see her," she said faintly. "Ask her if she would mind coming up. Pull up the blinds, please." Nona obeyed, picked up a few of the articles out of

place, and set the room in better order. As soon as she had left the room Sylvia staggered to her feet, feeling weak and dizzy. What had Emily to tell her? She dreaded yet longed to see her. She threw herself into an armchair and uneasily awaited Emily's knock. She was not kept long in suspense, for Miss Griscom appeared almost at once.

She was a tall, handsome girl, with a dash and sparkle about her, a flow of spirits and a fund of humor which was well calculated to attract a quiet man like Bennett Duvall, and might well serve to fascinate a less diffident one. "It is too bad to disturb you," she said. "Don't get up; I'll sit right here." She drew up a rocking-chair. "Nona says you have a wretched headache, and really I had no business to come on you like this, but I couldn't come to-morrow as you asked me to do in your note, and so I thought I would drop in and tell you why, because I couldn't explain very well by writing." She looked steadfastly at Sylvia whose color had again left her, and who was leaning back against her chair looking really ill.

"I am afraid your head aches terribly, Sylvia," Emily went on. "Really, I'd better go. I am afraid you are not able to hear me."

"Oh, no, no," Sylvia put out a protesting hand. "I am all right. A headache isn't dangerous, only uncomfortable. Sit still, please. You were saying—" A thousand thoughts rioted through her head. Had Emily come to confront her with a charge? Had she a confession to make? "Go on," she said.

Emily threw back her fur collar, and leaned forward. "Oh, Sylvia, I came to tell you first, because I know I have been mean to monopolize Graham Waters, but I thought you would understand. It was never serious; you knew that, and now—" She paused so long that Sylvia again took alarm. Emily sat with half averted face, and after a moment or two said: "Bennett has written to me. You understand, don't you, Sylvia? Please say you are very glad for me and that you wish me joy." She leaned forward and her bright face was full of a tender softness.

At the relief which her words brought the

blood surged up into Sylvia's face. "I congratulate you heartily," she said. "I am very glad for you — both."

"But wasn't it just like Bennett to go off as soon as he had sent the note. I believe he had some one mail it for him so he could be safely out of the danger of taking it back at the last moment, for he went off in the early train and this wasn't at the post-office when I was there at nine o'clock. Another man wouldn't have done such a queer thing, but it was just like Bennett. I will venture to say he was scared to death, poor boy. Could you believe that it is his very unlikeness to other men that makes me like him better than anyone else?"

"It is because he is so different from you," said Sylvia, brightening visibly now that the great dread was lifted from her, "but he is a dear good fellow; everyone knows that."

"I think that is what first attracted me: his utter goodness, his patience, and quiet tolerance of my whims and caprices," said Emily thoughtfully; "yet I wish he had not gone away," she continued.

"But he will be back soon."

"Yes, but to go just now; though perhaps he thought I should see more clearly and that he could bear it better if I refused him. Oh, he didn't know that there was no danger of that." She gave a little conscious happy laugh. "And to think he forgot to give me his Washington address, but Mr. Harwood will forward his letters, I suppose."

"Mr. Harwood?"

"Why yes, they are such close friends and are partners in everything. Didn't you know that they had taken an office together, and that Mr. Harwood is going to practice law here?"

"Oh yes, but I had forgotten." Sylvia felt a strange sense of apprehension; she could scarcely tell why, but she shook it off and said: "It was very good of you to come and tell me first, and I certainly appreciate it."

"And we're good friends."

"Why, of course we are."

"I've thought of late that you didn't like me as you used to when we were school girls," said Emily in her outspoken way, "and if I had not

told you in the beginning that I didn't care a rap for Graham, and that it was only a little scheme to make Bennett feel that — that there might be some danger of losing me, I should have thought you were angry because I was so nice to Graham."

"Graham seemed very content," said Sylvia in an aggrieved tone.

"What would you have had him do? Weren't you playing the same trick on him? I thought so and it was a funny little plot all around, and now that my deep laid designs have ended so happily, I hope you and Graham will follow the example of Bennett and me. Graham is a nice boy and you do like him, don't you, Sylvia?"

"I like him very well, yes," said Sylvia, feeling that she could afford to be non-committal.

"And you'll be good friends with me?" Emily persisted. "I am so content that I shall probably be a perfect ninny and won't care to look at anyone but Bennett, so there can't be any rivalry between us. I have always felt that you did look upon me as a rival," she went on frankly, "but you needn't have done it, and now I am

simply impossible. Now, I am going. I have stayed ever so much longer than I intended and I suppose I have been a maudlin, sentimental goose, but please don't laugh at me; go and be just as silly as I am and you will have my warmest congratulations. Oh, by the way, I forgot that the thing I really came for was to explain why I couldn't come to-morrow; I must go up to the city to tell mamma about all this. I always tell her everything, you know, and I cannot rest till I have seen her; she is staying with Aunt Kate for a little while. I hope I haven't driven you mad with my chatter, and that your headache will soon be better."

"It is better already," Sylvia assured her. "You really have done me good; you are such a breezy individual, Emily, that you are like a whiff of fresh air to an ailing person. Yes, I really feel much better." They kissed each other fervently and Emily took her departure, leaving Sylvia weak and unnerved, but triumphantly happy. Her remorse for her deed had been of the quality that regrets the act only when it is found out. The principle of the thing was of little moment,

the possible failure and humiliation were everything, and so she rejoiced, though the suspense had affected her physically and she felt that any continuance of it would have made her really ill. She cheerfully welcomed Nona, who appeared in a few minutes, and to her she announced that she was much better. Would Nona get her a cup of tea and a cracker? Of course Nona was only too glad to be of service and she fussed about, settling Sylvia comfortably and waiting on her with the air of devotion which was always most agreeable to Sylvia.

"What a nice girl Emily is," she said in a satisfied tone as she stirred her cup of tea.

Nona laughed. "You didn't think so yesterday. What has come over the spirit of your dreams?"

Sylvia laughed too, a little consciously. "I can afford to think so now. She has accepted Bennett Duvall; she came to tell me."

Nona brought her hands softly together. "Oh, how glad I am. So all our plotting and planning was for naught; we might have saved ourselves the trouble, but — why it must have

been a very recent thing, for we know it hadn't come about last evening, or else Emily is a worse flirt than I thought her. Bennett went away early this morning, some one said; that is curious, too."

"There are other means of communication than by word of mouth, my dear. You didn't suppose that Bennett would ever have the courage to face a No, from Emily. He probably wrote to her."

Nona was very thoughtful, then she scanned her sister's face earnestly. Was it possible that after all—? But no; there had been so little time; she could scarcely have completed so painstaking a task in a short hour, and the girl smiled with a sense of relief. "I am very, very glad," she repeated, "and more so that no one but themselves is responsible in the matter. If we had meddled—" *we* she generously put it, "and it had turned out to be an unhappy marriage we could never forgive ourselves."

Sylvia spoke up sharply. "Here, take this cup. You are always borrowing trouble; you remind me of the story Mammy True tells of the

old woman who was forever working herself up into a state of mind supposing this would happen and that would happen, when nothing was going to happen at all except in her own imagination. I think I shall lie down again. I feel much better though I did not manage to get a nap. Just hand me my wrapper and I will make myself comfortable. There now, cover me up, and I will try to go to sleep and I will feel all fresh for this evening if anyone comes. By the way, I have finished with your scrap-book; you can take it along with you. I really found some of the things quite interesting." She turned over on her pillow and closed her eyes, and Nona left her.

Carrying to her room her scrap-book she sat on the broad window-sill with it before her, turning over the pages leisurely. Presently she pushed it aside with an exclamation of dismay, for lying between the pages which enclosed Bennett Duvall's copy of the little poem was another sheet which appeared to be a second copy, so much like the first that only one very familiar with the handwriting could detect the slightest differ-

ence. Nona gazed at it with staring eyes. Could it be possible that after all — But no, she would not believe it. She would never ask and in this case it would be better not to find out. It might have been only a half-formed intention of her sister's, one which after events had made unnecessary to carry out. "It would take anyone a long time," Nona reflected, "and she couldn't have had time. She could not bring herself to such a piece of deceit, oh no, it was just an experiment to see what she could do. I can't believe it was anything else." But she carefully tore the sheet into shreds and burned them in her open fire. Yet in spite of her effort to reassure herself there was an under-current of discomfort whenever she thought of the matter, which was oftener than she desired.

As for Sylvia, she promptly went to sleep. Her fears were allayed; she was mentally and physically exhausted and she lost no time in refreshing herself. Everything was plain sailing now. Emily would lose no time in announcing her engagement and then — then —. She wakened with a placid sense of peace and comfort

and a little while after Nona heard her singing softly about her room. It was quite evident that Sylvia was not burdened by any trouble, and Nona felt a further sense of reassurance. "I couldn't sing if I had done such a thing," she told herself, and measuring Sylvia by her own standards, she rested in the belief that all was well.

She would have been more perturbed if she had been aware of an interview between Bennett Duvall and his friend Randolph Harwood which took place a few days later. "Did you ever know me to show symptoms of insanity?" Bennett began the conversation by saying.

"Well, not exactly," returned Randolph with a little mocking smile. "Possibly I shouldn't put it as strong as that."

"I'm not joking, Ran. Did you ever know me to walk in my sleep or to do things of which I was not conscious in my waking hours?"

"Never, to my knowledge. What's up, old fellow?"

Bennett drew a note from his pocket and looked at it fixedly. "If it were any other girl but

Emily Griscom I would say it was a joke or a put-up job, or something like that, but she is too honest and sincere, bless her." He lapsed into silence for a few minutes before he said slowly: "Congratulate me, Ran. I am engaged to Emily."

"Tare an' ages!" exclaimed Randolph. "Have you actually faced the music? I do congratulate you with all my heart. Emily is a fine girl. There is no need to ask if you are happy."

"Happy?" Bennett lifted his eyes and Randolph was satisfied. "But," added Bennett slowly, "I did not have the courage to offer myself — I would not tell this to another creature in the world but you, Ran — and some kind friend took the matter into his own hands." He looked fixedly at his friend. "It isn't worth while to ask you if you did it, Ran. I know you too well to believe you capable of a deception like that, even though you believed it would help me out. But the puzzle is, who in the dickens was it, and why did he do it?"

"Will you state the facts?"

"The fact is that one of the letters you for-

warded to me while I was in Washington was from Miss Emily Griscom, and that it was in reply to a letter she supposed to be from me. She accepted me in all good faith, and so far as she is concerned she shall never know the truth of the matter, if I die defending it. You can see what a dreadful predicament, what an outrage to her it would be. In point of fact my unknown friend has done me an immense service whether as a joke or not — yet — "

"Exactly. Your unknown friend has committed a forgery, and it might have been anything but a joke."

"But fortunately it is all right. I can't forget that part of it."

"You haven't the least idea who it could be?"

"Not the faintest."

"But you'd like to find out?"

"Naturally."

"You have seen Miss Emily, of course."

"Oh yes, I did not lose any time, you can rest assured, and there is no doubt of her belief that the letter came from me."

"Did she show it to you?"

"No; in fact, before I left there, I was under the impression that I must have written it after all. It seemed such a very natural thing for me to have done."

Randolph laughed. "I would ask her to let you have it. Make some excuse about wanting it, and we'll look it over together. It must be a pretty clever piece of work, if it deceived her."

"Yes; but still I write rather an ordinary business hand, and I have seldom written to her, for I would always rather make an excuse to see her, so she cannot be very familiar with my writing and would probably not notice any discrepancy."

"Nevertheless, try to get hold of the letter, or note, or whatever it is; I don't suppose it was a telegram."

Bennett laughed. "Hardly."

"Well, even though the writer has done you a good turn, I've not much opinion of the principles of a person who could do such a thing, whatever the motive; it is deceit pure and simple; forgery as a bald fact, and I wouldn't trust the person around the corner. Anyone who could descend to such a performance, joke or no joke, will do

other things of a like nature whenever the occasion presents."

"I am not disposed to be so censorious," returned Bennett.

"Naturally not, in your state of mind, but if the fellow were a clerk where I happened to bank my money, I'd draw out my entire deposit before night."

"Nonsense! It might have been a thoughtless prank, or it might have been done by someone who really had an eye to my happiness and who, seeing my devotion to Miss Emily, thought I had been dangling after her long enough and decided to settle the matter for us, a possible rival, maybe, who wished to know if the coast was clear."

"Then he has an unqualified lot of impudence; it's assuming too much, and I'd knock such a fellow down if I were in your place."

"Oh no. You are aware, and so am I, and probably the world at large knows that I am superlatively bashful and that I might have gone on in this way for time without limit and have grown gray before I plucked up the courage to

say what I felt to a girl like Emily Griscom. I simply couldn't, Ran. I confess I've wanted to often enough, and have even thought at times that I might have half a chance, but I couldn't bring myself to the scratch, and of late — well, I've not had much encouragement, and have felt pretty blue over it."

"So, I suspected. Well, it's come your way, and I am heartily glad, but I am as curious as you. I should like to know who wrote that letter. Oh, I'll be mum. I understand the situation, and not for my right hand would I ever place the girl you love in a false position; you know that, Ben."

"I wouldn't have told you if I had doubted it," returned Bennett quietly.

"Then we have no more to say on that score; but get hold of that letter and we'll see what is to be made of it. You're off? Give my regards to Miss Emily. I suppose you will announce the engagement without delay. There is no reason why you shouldn't."

"There is every reason why we should. I will get the letter if I can." And Bennett went out with a buoyant step.

CHAPTER V

MRS. BENONI WILSON

Nona's estimate of other persons was based upon the quality of her own motives. She could not conceive it possible for another to do a thing which to her would be out of the question. She was a most unsuspicious person and guileless in her belief that every one meant well. Sylvia's little tyrannies did not make much impression upon her; they depended, the younger girl thought, upon other things than qualities of mind and disposition. If Sylvia felt well she was pleasant and agreeable, if she were not well she was fretful and said spiteful things; that Sylvia had not a good disposition, that she was vain and envious, she could not believe. Moreover, Nona rather admired Sylvia's arrogance and wished that she could queen it over others as her sister did, and when her sister said and did things which would be tolerated from no one

else, she would say with a little air of pride: "Oh, Sylvia can say or do anything she wishes to, and nobody minds it."

It was to her rather eccentric grandmother that she sometimes took her confidences, for she had a sharp way of going to the root of a matter and frequently cleared up Nona's difficulties in a way which, though it was not always agreeable, was generally a satisfactory one, so far as lucidity was concerned.

Mrs. Benoni Wilson lived just beyond the town limits. Her establishment was not a large one and her right hand helper was an old colored woman who did wonders in the matter of cookery, but who ruled all under her with a rod of iron. "Miss Luke" alone was "pompered," and for her nothing was too good. After the death of her daughter, Nona's mother, Mrs. Wilson had never entered her son-in-law's house, and when her granddaughters wished to see her they journeyed out to the farm which lay along the bank of the river.

It was the morning after Emily's visit that Nona announced her determination of going to

see her grandmother. "I don't see why you wish to trudge away out there," said Sylvia petulantly. "I thought you would stay at home to-day and we'd see about our costumes."

"That's just why I am going," returned Nona quietly.

"Because you don't wish to help me?" Sylvia assumed an air of injured innocence.

"No," returned Nona, "because I should like to see if grandma has anything in the garret which will do for me."

"Oh," said Sylvia mollified. "Well, all I hope is that she'll not be in one of her sarcastic moods. Your trip won't do you much good if she is. You'll not be back till evening, I suppose."

"No, and maybe not till to-morrow."

It was not without some misgivings that Nona started off; there was always an element of uncertainty in these visits; she might be received with icy politeness or she might be welcomed with open arms; it all depended upon her grandmother's mood and her rheumatism. It had not yet occurred to the girl that there was more

warmth in her reception when she went alone. Her grandmother had never forgiven her son-in-law's second marriage, and did not forgive Sylvia for looking more like her father than her mother. The last time Sylvia had been to the farm she had come back with such a report of her grandmother's unpleasantness that Nona had refrained from making another visit very soon, being indignant that anyone should treat Sylvia cavalierly. "We're not dependent upon grandmother," she said, "and I will make it one while before I go." But her indignation had gradually softened, and as she walked briskly along she told herself that she ought to have gone sooner. "After all," she reflected, "she is our nearest relative, and though she is queer and cranky, and pretends to turn her back upon us because we stand up for mamma, after all, she is lonely, and she is our own mother's mother and has had a lot of sorrow, even though she does preach to us about a chastened spirit and the uses of adversity and all that."

By the time she had reached her grandmother's gate she had quite warmed toward her relative

and was ready to overlook the rather cold reception with which she met.

"Have you been ill?" asked Mrs. Wilson severely.

"No, grandma. Sylvia had a bad headache yesterday, but we are all about as usual." Mrs. Wilson resumed her occupation of sorting garden seeds and made no comment.

"The walking has been so bad and it has been so cold," Nona went on apologetically, knowing her grandmother's silence meant reproach, "and besides," she gathered courage as she went on, "Sylvia said she didn't think you cared particularly to have us come out often, and you know we hear from you every week when Thad brings the butter and eggs. We do not wish to wear out our welcome," she added.

Mrs. Wilson shook an envelope of tomato seeds into a box and said grimly: "You have a good many years to live in all probability, and in the course of time you will know how much dependence to place upon all Sylvia Ridgely says."

Nona was immediately on the defensive. "I don't know what you mean," she said coldly.

"Sylvia is my very dear sister and if she felt that she was not welcome she, no doubt, had good reason to."

"Tut, tut," spoke up her grandmother. "She spoke the truth. I am not particularly anxious to see her every day. I don't blame you for standing up for your sister, though it's more than she does for you, I notice; but you might have come sooner to see your old granny."

Nona bit her lip. She was inclined to resent the remarks about Sylvia and yet she knew that it was true that she should not have neglected her grandmother. "Yes, I do suppose I might have come before, but one does not like to go where there is a scolding waiting for one."

"Who is scolding? Come here and help me with these seeds. Take off your things and draw up that chair. You can mark these while I sort them."

Nona obeyed and set her chair before the round table in front of which her grandmother was at work. The room was a large sunny one, with growing plants in the south windows, and it possessed a cheerful orderliness that was very

pleasant. Her grandmother sat in an old-fashioned rocking-chair cushioned by her own hands with a quaint flowered chintz. "Now tell me," said Mrs. Wilson, "what has been going on. I hear a bit of gossip once in a while, but I like to have my news at first hand. What is this about a church concert?"

"There is to be one on the evening of St. Valentine's Day," Nona told her, "and we are all to wear old-fashioned costumes; it is to be something like an old-time singing-school. You'll come in to it, won't you, grandma?"

"Not I. My old bones won't allow me to go out at night in February. I suppose Sylvia is in her element if there's any dressing up to be done."

"No, she's not particularly enthusiastic, but of course she'll be the prettiest girl there," said Nona calmly. "Are these to be marked 'Trophies'?"

"Let me see. Yes, those are Trophies. Sylvia hasn't much of a voice, I am thankful to say."

"She can afford not to have, for she has pretty nearly everything else and her voice is very sweet,

even if it isn't powerful." Sylvia was to be the bone of contention to-day, that was very evident. It was usually Sylvia or Mrs. Ridgely who was the target for Mrs. Wilson's sharp remarks, and Nona was kept on the defensive to-day, as was generally the case.

"What's she going to wear?"

"The blue brocade over a silk petticoat."

"The one you had for your tableaux? Why don't you wear it yourself?"

Nona was silent till she could frame a fitting reply which was: "When there is only one dress of that kind in the family it is only proper that the elder should have the best right to it."

"Humph!" Mrs. Wilson regarded Nona's downcast face with some amusement. "That doesn't answer my question; what are you going to wear?"

"I don't know."

"And you came out here to see if I had anything for you, was that it?"

Nona raised her eyes truthfully. "Yes, that was it, although I meant to come anyhow, and I should have come sooner except for Sylvia's dis-

couraging account of her last visit. I didn't wish my head taken off."

"You are a saucy child. Sylvia will never have that text about the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit upon her gravestone. She is about the most self-satisfied person I know, and how she gets around people passes my comprehension. But most persons swallow flattery as fish do a bait and she is an arrant flatterer when she can gain anything by it. She pretends to be very gentle and beguiling, but she can show her claws fast enough once she is crossed."

Nona deliberately arose and put aside her work. Crossing the room she picked up her hat from the big haircloth sofa upon which she had laid it.

"Where are you going?" asked her grandmother.

"Home."

"You are going to do nothing of the kind. You are a little goose. I can say what I choose of my own grandchild."

"Not to me of my sister." You can say what you choose, I suppose, grandmother, but it will

have to be to other ears than mine, for I will not stay to hear it."

"You are a spunky little creature and you let Sylvia pull the wool over your eyes abominably. However, I will cry off and we'll talk of something else. I am a lonely old woman, Benona, and I don't wish to antagonize the only creature I have left me to love. When you have suffered as I have done, perhaps you will be bitter, too." Her lips trembled and her strong hands shook as she piled her packages of seeds one on top of the other. She was not really an old woman, and in spite of many griefs, bore herself erectly for her sixty years, with a strength and dignity that made her a capable manager. It was very seldom that she showed the feeling she now displayed and Nona realized that she had felt, more than she cared to confess, the infrequency of her favorite grandchild's visits. Therefore her heart melted within her, but still she hesitated. She must be loyal to Sylvia. If it came to a question of choosing between her grandmother and her sister it must be the latter who was to be considered first of all.

She stood still for a moment and then she went up to her grandmother, laying her young cheek against her gray head. "Don't you think, grandma, that it would be very hard for you to hear anyone speak against a person you loved as I love Sylvia? Could you have borne it if any one had said harsh things of my mother, for instance?"

Her grandmother turned from her sharply. "Don't let me hear you mention her in such a connection. Come around here where I can look at you, Nona. You remind me of your mother sometimes, in your looks as well as your ways. I wish you would come and stay with me."

"To hear you berate my sister every day and to listen to harsh things of my father? You know we talked it all over and settled that, once and for all, after papa died, grandma, but I will come to see you oftener, though please, please, don't say such things of Sylvia. I can't stand it."

A little smile flickered around her grandmother's mouth. "I'll try not, but she affords me such excellent opportunities — as a text. Still

— there, I'll not say another word — if I can help it. We will go back to that question of what you are to wear. Perhaps I can find you something, but first let it be understood that you are to wear it. Under no consideration will I lend it to any one else. Do you agree to that?"

"Certainly. Who else would wear it? I wouldn't offer it to anyone, I am sure."

"You wouldn't offer it, but some one else might calmly appropriate it. I have something in mind and after dinner you can go up into the attic with me and get it. I wish you would ask the price of turkeys when you go back. Thad is so stupid and never goes beyond Johnson's, and I don't believe he gets the best market price. I still have quite a number to sell; they have thriven very well this year. You'll not forget to ask and let me know?"

"I will remember."

"Go tell Hannah to stir up a few pancakes for dinner, and here, take the keys and get out a bottle of blackberry wine; it goes well with sugar as a sauce for the pancakes, or would you rather have peach marmalade and cream with pound cake for your dessert?"

"Oh, pancakes, surely, and the peach marmalade for supper."

"You'll stay to supper? Then you'll not go home till to-morrow." Mrs. Wilson spoke with such real pleasure that Nona was more than ever conscience-stricken. After all, grandma did like to have her there and she could avoid angles for herself, though when it came to smoothing over matters for others it was not so easy.

Hannah's large proportions took up a deal of room in the kitchen, which was an apartment separated by a covered way from the rest of the house, and the old colored woman here held her sway She was not a person to be lightly approached, and Nona rather dreaded being messenger to her. She stood on the threshold of the room, from which savory odors issued, and gave her message. "Grandma says, Aunt Hannah, will you please make some pancakes for dinner?"

"Who I gwine mek pancakes fo'?" grunted Hannah. "I doan nuvver ha' to mek pancakes a Wednesda'. Miss Luke ain spectin' I gwine do hit nuther." She glared at Nona as if she had by some hocus pocus prevailed upon her

grandmother to disobey this law of the Medes and Persians. "Hit a Wednesda'," she repeated, "an' I got my dinnah all lay out. Dey gwine be pie dis day."

"Oh, very well," said Nona carelessly. "I'm just telling you what grandma said." And she disappeared, knowing very well that the pancakes would appear promptly, but knowing also from past experience that it was better not to raise an issue, and that Hannah's mutterings were as harmless as heat lightning.

She always enjoyed the meals at her grandmother's table, served as they were on old blue India china, with cut glass and silver a century old. She liked to sit where she could see the glow from the stove shining upon the brass warming-pan hanging by the tall chimney-piece, and where she could look through the western window at the embrowned fields and the straw-stack where the cows stood contentedly in the winter sunlight. It was all so peaceful except for that sarcastic, bitter spirit which dwelt within. She sighed as she thought of this, and her grandmother asked her, "Why do you draw

such a long countenance, Nona? It isn't becoming, I can tell you. Your face is thin enough at best. I advise you to cultivate a smile." Then Nona did smile. "I was thinking," she said, "how nice it would be if some people I know would become Quakers."

"Why, pray?"

"Because they would perhaps cultivate a love of peace."

Her grandmother wiped her lips with a hard little movement. "My family were all fighters, I am happy to say. I come of Revolutionary stock on both sides. I have no patience with those people who allow themselves to be imposed upon and who weakly yield when they ought to make a stand for their rights. Pretty progress there would be if there were none to protest for the claims of the weaker. There would be worse government and more outrageous imposition and more disposition to anarchy than there is now if there were not a few brave souls to oppose tyranny, a few who have the courage of their convictions and are willing to fight for them. This cry of peace at any cost isn't always

the noblest one. Half the time people are so inert and so chicken-hearted that they will sit still and take anything; they'll see wrongs go unrighted and the weaker crushed under the heel of the stronger rather than raise a finger to prevent it, because, forsooth, they love peace."

Nona smiled. "When I have a wrong to right, grandma, I hope I will have some one as belligerent as you to take up the cudgels for me."

Mrs. Wilson nodded her head. "I can do it. I have fought many a battle and have seldom been worsted, unless," she said gravely, "by that unseen foe, Death." She changed the subject almost immediately and said: "Speaking of Revolutionary ancestors, I wish I had some old costumes for you, but I have nothing older than some of my own cast-off garments, those that I had when I was married. However, we may find something that will do. We can go up now and hunt through the chests if you have finished. Can you eat another pancake?"

Nona shook her head. "I could but I won't. They are so good; no one makes them quite as good as Hannah does. I am ready."

She followed her grandmother to the garret with a feeling of pleasant anticipation. To be sure there were now few remnants of a very old time, but there were still some of Mrs. Wilson's girlish fripperies, and one or two gowns of a later period. These her grandmother drew out carefully. She looked at Nona critically as she smoothed out a soft gray silk. "Speaking of Quakers," she said, "this is Quakerish enough, and I don't know but that it will suit you very well. There is a funny old beaver bonnet that is about the last of the things left from the last century, you may have that; and there are some laces in that trunk that you may have for a cross kerchief, if you wish to look like a little Puritan, or there is my old amber brocade, if you think that will suit you better."

Nona gazed at the two gowns with speculative eyes. She found it hard to make up her mind. "I wish you would choose for me, grandma. I really am so divided in my mind. Which would you rather I should take, and which is the most suitable?"

"The gray seems to me to be the best, and

when you have worn it as it is, you can make it over and it will look very well. I will keep the brocade till the next occasion, when —"

Nona gave her a look and Mrs. Wilson laughed dryly. "When you have worn out the gray one," she said.

"Here are a lot of old slippers," said Nona, diving into the tray of a trunk. "I have a pair that will do, but Sylvia hasn't."

"Not one single thing goes to Sylvia," said her grandmother setting her mouth obstinately. "She's chosen to help herself to what was rightfully yours, so let her manage the rest as she can. Besides all those slippers are too small for her."

"But she didn't help herself; she asked me and I told her she might have the dress."

"It amounts to the same thing, and she is not to touch a thing I give you, do you hear? Not a scrap of lace, not a feather. There, go along and carry those down." So, with her arms piled up, Nona went down the garret stairs, feeling that she was well equipped, but that there was a drop of discomfort in her cup of satisfaction. She

would like to have shared with Sylvia, and though this she did not care to admit, she rather dreaded Sylvia's envy of her possessions.

True to her word, Mrs. Wilson kept the peace during the rest of Nona's stay, and she went home bearing her "loot" as she laughingly called it, and being aware that her own relations with her grandmother were upon a pleasanter basis than ever. "If grandma were not so dreadfully set in her notions and so prejudiced against Sylvia, I'd like to go there often," she said to herself.

CHAPTER VI

SYLVIA'S NEWS

But the question of the costumes sank into insignificance before the important piece of news which greeted Nona when she saw her sister. Sylvia grasped her by the waist and whirled her into the room before she had a chance to deposit her band-box and bundles, and these went tumbling to the floor. Then Sylvia clasped her rapturously, kissing her cheeks and whispering: "Oh, Nona, Nona, you don't know what has happened; you don't know. Oh, dear little Nona, I do love everybody so much. I am so happy."

"Why?" Nona managed to gasp.

"It's all right," said Sylvia, swinging Nona's hands lightly. "Graham was here last night, and that was why he was attentive to Emily; he was jealous and she knew it, and she told him it would be the best thing in the world for him if he appeared devoted to her, so I would see it.

Oh, Nona, as if he had to do that. And so we talked it all over; that was afterward, you know, after he had said the other things about caring for me so much and all that, and so we are engaged, too. Isn't it strange that there should be two engagaments right together that way? Our Old Folks' Concert is doing wonders, isn't it?" She gave her sister another ecstatic hug and Nona found voice to say: "Oh, dearest, I hope you will be happy, but it will be dreadful to lose you."

"But you will not. You can live with me, you know. I think I shall be married before Emily is, because there hasn't been a wedding in town for some time, and it will create more of a sensation than if Emily's were to come first. She is to be married in the fall; I went right over there and told her, for she told me first. Won't we have fun getting the trousseau? You will have to help me, for you can do such things so well. I'd like to have lots and lots of hand sewing; it's so much nicer than machine work."

"Does mamma know?"

"No, I haven't told anyone but Emily; I wished to tell you first."

"But you have told Emily first," returned Nona in an aggrieved tone.

"I should have told you right away if you had been here. Don't you think Graham is handsome, Nona? Everyone will think we are a fine-looking couple, I know."

"Of course they will." Nona spoke rather dejectedly, for the news was a shock. She couldn't bring herself to the acceptance of the fact that Sylvia was going to leave her, for she was not happy at the prospect. Of course, she had known that Sylvia would marry some day, but it had seemed a long while off, and to have the news come thus suddenly upon her with the prospect of her marrying in the immediate future was too much.

There was no cloud upon Sylvia's horizon. She had forgotten all about the wretchedness which had preceded this happy state of affairs, and having once satisfied herself that she was safe, she did not think it worth while to take any further concern in the business of the forged letter. "All's well that ends well," she laughingly said to Nona. "That precious old letter that

you were so shocked about did us all a good turn, after all."

Nona dropped her sister's hands and started back. "You don't mean to say you really wrote it, Sylvia, and that all this is the result?"

"Of course I do."

Nona sat down on a chair, and, covering her face with her hands, burst into tears. Sylvia regarded her with a slight frown. "You silly little goose," she said, "aren't you ashamed to cry over my happiness."

"It isn't that," replied Nona, "but it is because — because you could be capable of doing such a dreadful thing. I couldn't have believed it of you, Sylvia. I didn't think you would stoop to such a thing."

"I am sure you were the first one to propose it; I should never have thought of it but for you, and it is all right. Nobody seems to be miserable except yourself," said Sylvia sarcastically. "'The greatest good to the greatest number'; you're fond of quoting that; why don't you accept the application?"

But Nona continued to weep forlornly. It hurt

her beyond measure, and that Sylvia should see no harm in it was worse still. If she were capable of one deception to gain her ends, why not of another, or any number of others? It was that which gave her the heartache. Her sweet, pretty sister, that she was so devoted to, must she lose any part of her respect and admiration, which heretofore she had been so ready to give her?

Sylvia stood watching her, a pout upon her pretty lips. "I think you're very mean," she said at last. "Nobody is hurt. I don't see what in the world you are crying about. Some of these days I shall tell Bennett and Emily what a joke I played upon them."

Nona lifted her head. "Don't, Sylvia, don't, I implore you. Please never do that. I couldn't stand it."

"Couldn't stand what?" asked Sylvia, looking slightly bewildered.

"That they should find out that you had ever done such an underhanded thing. Of course Bennett must know that somebody did it, but I hope he will never find out who it was."

"If you think anybody else is going to have

such a Puritan conscience as yours, you are mistaken. I don't doubt but that they would think it a huge joke, as I do. Still, as it seems to distress you so much, I won't tell."

"And I never will, never. It is your secret and mine, Sylvia. We must keep it." And in that hour she took her first step in the direction which placed Sylvia upon a different plane. She was no longer above her. She was an erring child, to be led up higher. Nona knew suddenly that her own horizon extended far away beyond the narrow limits of Sylvia's world. It was the shattering of her first cherished illusion, and the young heart suffered intensely.

Mrs. Ridgely received the news of Sylvia's engagement with a pleased smile. It suited her exactly that one or both of the girls should marry. She was not for one moment to be persuaded that to her own future plans she could sacrifice her step-daughters, and so long as they needed her she would give them the care and attention they had always received from her. But once they were married, she, too, would be free, and then perhaps —. But of any possibilities she then had

in mind she did not think it worth while to speak. There was no objection to Graham Waters; he was a young man with no marked vices, if with no marked virtues; he was sufficiently able to support a wife and, though rather conceited and of no great intellectual ability, if he suited Sylvia there was no cause for complaint; therefore when Sylvia decided upon a June wedding Mrs. Ridgely readily gave a promise of co-operation.

In the anticipation of so great an event, the concert was of minor importance, so far as Sylvia was concerned, yet she took sufficient interest to give attention to her pretty costume and to express herself respecting Nona's stinginess in not sharing the laces with her, totally ignoring the fact of her grandmother's word in the matter. "She won't be there, and she never in the world will know what I have on," she told Nona.

"But she will ask me."

"Well, suppose she does, you can say you didn't lend me any, for I will just take them."

"Oh, but please don't," said Nona in distress; "she would be sure to find it out in some way. I will lend you anything I possess, Sylvia, but I must keep my word."

"You're much too stiff and particular ever to get through this world safely," said Sylvia. "I declare it is ridiculous how priggish you are over such little foolish matters. One would suppose you were to be brought before a court of justice to hear you talk. I believe it is all Margaret Foster's doings, and it comes of her going up every year to that queer Connecticut town. I suppose they still have Blue Laws and things up there. I am glad I don't take life so seriously. Nobody expects people to be so literal. But if you don't wish me to wear any of those things I won't. Thank goodness, my happiness doesn't depend upon my grandmother's old scraps of lace."

"I wish I could lend them to you," said Nona, wistfully. "And Sylvia, you know Margie isn't a bit Puritanical, for she is our cousin, and she has ideas as we have; it is ridiculous to talk as if those people where she goes in the summer were a hundred years behind the times."

"Oh, well," said Sylvia airily, "it isn't worth talking about."

Mrs. Wilson received the news of the engagement in grim silence. Sylvia went out herself to

announce it, and did not return with any increase of regard for her grandmother, for it was a fact that the old lady made herself distinctly disagreeable. Sylvia's pretty little ways, her trumpetings of how she had assisted in this or that good cause, her deprecatory protestings that she didn't see why every one was so lovely to her, were valued for precisely what they were worth by this uncompromising old soul who despised affectations and set at naught all pretence; and when Sylvia, thinking to propitiate her grandmother, told of the work of her Sunday School class, and that she was secretary of this club, and on the committee of that guild, her grandmother looked over her spectacles and said coldly: "When I was a girl we supposed those things were the natural duties of those professing to call themselves Christians, but we didn't always make a point of letting our right hands know what our left hands were doing. I believe the crying upon the housetops was quite a Pharisaical performance."

Then Sylvia bit her lip and the tears filled her eyes. "You are really cruel, grandma. I thought you would like to hear about what I have

been doing. I do those things because I like to."

"That they may be heard of men?" asked Mrs. Wilson.

"I'll never go there again, never," Sylvia told Nona passionately. And it is not surprising that she did not feel encouraged to.

Meanwhile Nona was enjoying her rehearsals, and since Sylvia was so absorbed in her own affairs as to afford her sister but little companionship, the latter was glad of opportunities which gave her a personal interest in outside matters. It was a little wearisome to Nona to have Graham, his compliments and opinions, the everlasting what "he said" and what "I said," made the sole topic of conversation when the sisters were alone, and she felt a relief from the strain upon her sympathies. Graham, upon closer acquaintance, did not appeal very strongly to her affections, and though she tried to feel a lively interest in him because he was to be her brother-in-law, she had only a mild liking for him. She always felt that he regarded her as a very colorless young girl, a mere twinkling little rushlight compared to Sylvia's splendor as

a star of the first magnitude. She did not resent this for she told herself that it was perfectly natural, but it was something of a relief to be allowed to shine by her own light and to find that in the company of certain others she was not unimportant.

The evening of the concert came at last and there was much bustle and chattering, and a great running back and forth behind the scenes. Sylvia, radiant in her square-cut bodice and quilted petticoat, was a dream of loveliness. Emily Griscom, bright and full of fun, looked coquettishly from under her plumed hat. She caught Nona around the waist as she was going on the stage. "Let me look at you, you little Puritan," she said. "You are the dearest Priscilla in this gray gown that I ever saw. Isn't she the demurest, cunningest creature?" She looked up at Randolph Harwood, who was passing.

He stopped and Nona felt herself blush under his close scrutiny. "I think she is the best representative of an eighteenth century maid that we have here this evening," he said.

"Now did he mean that for a compliment or

not?" said Emily, laughing, as she looked after him. "If he isn't about the most wary individual I ever saw I am mistaken. Don't fall in love with him, Nona, for he will spend so much time weighing his words that they will lose all their spontaneity by the time they reach you. He is as unresponsive as a clam. Why didn't he rave over you as he ought?"

Nona laughed. "Probably because he didn't think the subject afforded sufficient grounds for enthusiasm."

"There's the bass-viol; go along with you." And Emily gave her a little push, for the time to go on had actually come.

Then for the next hour the performers were conscious of nothing but that they must do their best, and all were absorbed in the singing. It was voted a great success and Nona received her share of compliments. Sylvia joined in the general acclaim and Nona felt that she must have done herself credit. Sylvia was contented because she felt that what she lacked in voice she made up in looks, and therefore she had no reproaches for Nona.

The next afternoon Nona was about to start out to the farm to give her grandmother an account of the affair, when she was called into the library by Mrs. Ridgely. Sylvia was already there, her lips compressed, and a frown on her forehead. "Come in, Nona," she said. Mrs. Ridgely, bland and composed, was sitting before the fire. "I have something to tell you which is really your right to know," said the latter lady. "You are not in a hurry?"

"Not specially." Nona seated herself.

"You may remember," Mrs. Ridgely went on, "that your father left this house to me. I have an opportunity of selling it, and as I shall not need it after next fall, I think I had better accept the offer, but I do not wish to do so if you or Sylvia know any good reason why it should not be sold."

"Oh, are we going away, or do you think it is too large for just two of us? Of course, after Sylvia is married it will seem as if it were larger than we shall need, but —"

"Yes," Mrs. Ridgely interrupted her, "after Sylvia is married, that is just it. I have felt up

to this time that my duty to you two girls must be my first and only one, and that so long as you both remained unmarried I would keep our home just as it was during your father's lifetime; but Sylvia's marriage removes the necessity, and you will not have one or two, but three homes open to you. I shall always be very glad to share my home with you, and Sylvia says she must have you with her, and then there is your grandmother's. I say my home, for I shall go to the city in the fall, and during the summer I shall visit my sister."

"To the city?"

"Yes, I am to be married in October, Nona."

Nona stared at Sylvia, but though she looked annoyed she said nothing. She was secure in her own future and it did not matter very much to her what her step-mother chose to do. For a moment a sense of desolation swept over Nona. This place which had been her home all her life would be taken from her. The tears filled her eyes and she turned away her head. "When do you give up the house?" she asked falteringly.

"Not till the first of July, after Sylvia's mar-

riage, you know. Would you like to go with me to my sister's then? I am sure you will be very welcome."

"I don't know what I should like to do. I cannot think about it so suddenly, mamma. Oh Sylvia, don't you see I am the only one who has no joy in all this?" she cried out.

"Why not?" returned her sister. "I am sure my happiness ought to be a joy to you, and you know, Nona, Graham is perfectly willing that you should come to us when we go to housekeeping, and I shall insist upon it. Dear me, I shall be dreadfully lonely in a house all day with nobody but servants, if you don't come, and I shall need you."

This comforted Nona somewhat, but she felt that she was not very enthusiastic in her manner when she said: "I hope you will be happy, mamma."

"I think I shall be," she returned in a satisfied tone. "Mr. Martin is a very estimable man, a widower with no children except a grown son who is married. You see, Nona, it would be very prejudicial to my interests if I refused such

an offer, for if you were married I should be entirely alone, and as it is, it will be an advantage to you also if you should never marry and should need a home. I repeat it that mine is always open to you."

"I am sure you are very kind," replied Nona a little forlornly, her feeling of loneliness augmented by the suggestion. At the same time she realized that the offer was meant in all kindliness and sincerity and that she had no right to feel rebellious. Mrs. Ridgely had always been, and would continue to be considerate. "I hope you will be very happy, both of you," she repeated. And then she went out. At this moment her heart yearned for her grandmother, and she had worked herself up into such a pitch by the time she reached the farm, that when in her grandmother's presence she threw herself into the arms ready for her and sobbed miserably.

"Why, Benona, my child," her grandmother said, stirred out of her usual calm, "what is the matter?"

Nona withdrew herself from the encircling arms and stood off a little. "I am very silly,"

she said, "but I feel as if the earth were giving way under me. Sylvia is to be married in June, you know, and the house will be sold and mamma will be married in October, and I am left."

"Then come to me." Mrs. Wilson spoke triumphantly. "I am not surprised to know this; in fact, I had suspected that it would come about." She was glad, really glad, and at that moment she forgave the future Mrs. Martin the possession of her daughter's married name since Mrs. Ridgely would soon renounce it. "It is a very sensible thing for your step-mother to do," she went on. "Come to me, Nona."

"But Sylvia wants me."

"What for? Won't she have her precious Graham?"

"Yes, but she may need me, too. Sylvia can't bear to be alone. She would mope all day in a house by herself. She is so dependent upon the society of others."

"In other words, she finds herself such poor company that she can't endure self-communion for long at a time. I don't wonder."

"Grandma, please."

"Ch well, I can't see Sylvia through your eyes; you can't expect it. If she hasn't resources within herself, she must be amused, I suppose, by some one else. I really think it would be rather difficult for anyone, even as vain as she is, to sit and pay herself compliments all day, and she must have them; they are her meat and drink. When you stop flattering her you will find that she doesn't need you quite as much as you thought."

'Oh grandma," said Nona again, "please don't make me any more miserable."

Her grandmother shook her head with a little smile. She was bent upon saying her worst of Sylvia to that young person's fondest admirer. It may have been that Mrs. Wilson was a little jealous, and would fain have had Nona centre her affections upon herself. However, she said no more just then except: "Tell me of the concert."

"It went off beautifully, and everyone said my dress was just right. I was scared to death at first, but I forgot myself in a little while. Was it you who sent me that lovely bunch of trailing

arbutus? It was the finishing touch, everyone said, and they all called me Priscilla, the Puritan maiden. I must put on the dress and show you how nice it looks."

"I send you arbutus? Where should I get it? It is too early to find it about here."

"I thought of course it was you Sylvia thought so, too. Who could it have been?"

"Sylvia thought so? Humph! Go on, tell me more."

"We all sang our best, the old songs you know, and we wound up with Old Hundred. I really was thrilled. I felt as if I were my own great-great-grandmother; the sound of the bass-viol and the old costumes and all that, gave me the queerest feeling of being set back a hundred years. Oh, I did enjoy it."

"What did you sing?"

Nona told her. "And they gave me an encore and I sang 'Phyllis Has Such Charming Graces.' The duet was good, they said, and I didn't mind that, for Mr. Harwood gave me confidence."

"Harwood? He is the young man who has

come here within the last year or so? A college chum of Bennett Duvall's, you said. I wonder if he has a taste for trailing arbutus."

Nona looked up surprised. "I never thought of that. Oh, no, I don't believe it was he." Yet the suggestion was not an unpleasant one and recurred to her more than once. But she did not tell Sylvia of her grandmother's surmise, for she felt that she would like to keep it to herself.

CHAPTER VII

CHANGES

"There is nothing that one can rely upon altogether except the fact of change," said Mrs. Wilson, and Nona felt how true this was as the summer approached and preparations went forward for the final breaking up.

"I feel like a plant torn up by the roots," she told Mr. Harwood one evening. They had become good friends since the concert, and though he did not often call, he did sometimes drop in for an evening of singing, and Nona had grown to look forward to his visits with more pleasure than she usually felt in those of other young men. She was looking thinner and paler than usual, for she had been sewing steadily for Sylvia. Who could resist that pretty plea that it would be so lovely to know that Nona's dear hands had set the stitches in her wedding garments, and that

they would have twice the value because of that? "Dear Nona, it is so sweet of you to wish to please me. Do you think you would mind hemstitching one more petticoat? I'd so like to have it." Such things as these Nona daily heard and so when the warm days came she was still putting her neat stitches while Sylvia took long drives and walks with Graham, or carried a bit of ruffling over to Emily Griscom's, coming home with six inches of lace sewed on it. "I simply can't work," she would say. "I am so restless. Besides, I can't do it half so well as you, anyhow, Nona. Just finish this for me; any time will do. There is Graham and I must go." And she would give Nona a peck of a kiss and run down stairs leaving the unfinished sewing.

But the wedding day once over Nona had time to think, and was not happier because of being less busy. It had been a beautiful wedding, everyone said, and in her office of maid of honor Nona had a large share in it. There were roses everywhere, and the bridesmaids, of whom Emily was one, in their rose-wreathed hats looked quite

in keeping with the season. The church was filled to its utmost capacity, and the whispers of "Isn't she lovely?" "What a beautiful bride," reaching Sylvia's ears as she walked up the aisle, were as nectar to her. She was really much in love and as she leaned on the arm of her handsome husband on the way to the carriage she felt that the supreme moment of her life had come, and when she drove away there was not a cloud upon her sky.

Perhaps it was because of the atmosphere of sentiment which surrounds a wedding that Randolph Harwood felt strongly moved to call upon the bride's sister the next evening. He had not forgotten the episode of the forged letter, and only that day had been given an opportunity of examining it, for Emily, all this time, had teasingly refused to allow Bennett possession of it. The wedding had brought her own approaching bridal day very near to her and she was disposed to yield any point which Bennett might make, and therefore he had triumphantly brought the letter to his friend. Together they had examined it; Randolph studied each word

and letter, looked at the water-mark on the paper, and confessed himself nonplussed, but not discouraged.

"I never use paper like that," Bennett told him.

"Do you know who does?"

"No, but we'll look out for it. You see it is neat, but rather old-fashioned in shape and texture, yet there is something pleasantly individual about it. It certainly is not the kind that comes done up in boxes such as we see at Stiles's, and which half the people in the town buy."

With the letter upon his mind Randolph took his way to the old Ridgely house, so soon to pass into other hands. He wondered how Nona felt about it. The little, slim, girlish figure rose pathetically before him. "By Jove," he said to himself, "I believe it was she I was watching all the time during the wedding, and the expression of her eyes haunts me. Am I as interested as all that? Pshaw! it's the influence of the wedding; such things always do arouse all a man's sentiment. I believe I'll not go there to-night." Nevertheless, the impulse was too strong for him and he went.

Nona all in white, sat in the cool, dim parlor. The odor of roses still filled the air. "I feel like hearing some music," said Mr. Harwood. "Is it too warm?"

"No, I think not, but I am in a melancholy mood and I have been poring over my mother's old music books, for nothing but 'Joys That We've Tasted' or 'The Old Sexton' seems to appeal to me just now."

"You are going to leave your old home, aren't you? I suppose that must give you a pang." He approached the piano and turned over the pages of the old music-book. "Sing this, won't you? 'She Wore a Wreath of Roses'; to me, it is beautiful."

"Yes, isn't it? But it reminds me of yesterday and that Sylvia —"

"Never mind," he said hastily; "I ought to have known better than to select that. We'll have something else, a real rollicking song that will drive away your blues." He sat down to the piano and burst out into a funny Irish song which he sang very well. "There," he said, when it was finished, "you sit down and sing me

a merry roundelay, as they used to call it. Where's the dancing, tripping little spring song you had here the other evening?"

Nona found it and put it on the rack, and proceeded to sing it in her true sweet voice, Randolph watching her the while. "What a dear guileless little face it is," he thought. "There is a great deal of character there, too; patience and strength of purpose and all that in the lines of her mouth. It is true that she is not a bit like her sister, as I have heard some persons deplore, but I believe I admire her face more."

"That is good," he said when she had concluded. "Thank you, Miss Nona. I believe that suits your voice as well as anything you sing. By the way, if you can give me the words of that little poem that we were talking about the other day, I think I can set it to a melody."

"Oh, can you? I should like that. You can be singing something while I copy it for you; there are only three stanzas that I remember." She busied herself over her task while Mr. Harwood sang softly. "It is too warm to sing," he said as she handed him the verses. "Sup-

pose we sit outside where it is cooler. I want your opinion on a legal matter."

Nona laughed. "I am afraid it will not be worth much."

"Oh yes, it will. It is a point in which morals are concerned more than law, and who is better able to judge of a matter of principle than a truly good woman?"

Nona was silent. A compliment from Randolph Harwood was a rarity and one of this kind was to be valued. They seated themselves on the little porch by the front door. The electric light at the corner beyond threw sharp shadows of the vines that clambered up the sides of the porch, and made Nona's white dress and the soft curve of her cheek stand out in distinct contrast to the dimness behind her.

"Now present your case," she said, smiling faintly.

"It is a case of forgery," said Mr. Harwood coming at once to the point. "Do you think there could be an occasion where it would be justifiable?"

The slim hand holding a fan clenched the han-

dle of it tightly. "No," she answered, half audibly.

"I am glad to hear you say that. I suppose in war times that it may sometimes be excused when there is a need to deceive the enemy, but I should always rather try something else in the way of strategy."

"What exactly is your definition of forgery?" asked Nona.

"The crime of counterfeiting or falsifying, I should say."

"It must always be a crime then, even when it does no one harm?"

Mr. Harwood looked at her sharply. Her face wore a strained look and her eyes were full of eager inquiry.

"In the proper sense, yes, though in some cases I suppose we might apply a milder term; but in any event it must be deceit."

"Deceit, yes," whispered Nona.

"If you knew a person who deliberately set to work to deceive through forgery, could you ever trust him or her again?"

"I don't — know." The words came haltingly.

"It seems to me," Mr. Harwood went on, "that a person who, to gain an end, no matter what, could go to work deliberately to plan a forgery is not to be trusted. If he could do so in a small matter, when the temptation came for a larger affair he would as willingly compass it. Don't you think so?"

"Oh, no, no," Nona cried out in distress. "He might be tempted once as you say, but if it happened to be a case where it did no one harm, he might think nothing of it; whereas if it took the proportions of a crime that would injure another he would not necessarily be tempted to do it."

Mr. Harwood shook his head. "I can't agree with you. I think it would be easier a second time, especially if no evil results followed the first act, and the criminal happened not to be found out."

"Criminal!" The word sounded frightful in Nona's ears. "Then you think a person who simply deceives to gain an end, perhaps really a good end, must always be called a criminal?"

"That does sound rather harsh, I admit. I

suppose there are cases where it might be a mere deceit, but I should think the person who did even that must be lacking in principle."

"I think I should consider the motive," said Nona thoughtfully. "If it were done for another's sake, it might be from over-zealousness, but it seems to me it might be more easily forgiven."

"But if it were done solely for oneself?"

"That would be another thing."

"And you could not so easily forgive it. I agree with you. Well, Miss Nona, we might spend an evening discussing this, but in the main, I think you agree with me. I am glad you set your face against deceit. We lawyers have some curious questions to settle sometimes and I am often puzzled, not so much over the strictly legal points, as over the moral ones. What have you decided for your summer plans?"

"As soon as mamma and I get everything settled about the house, I shall go to one of my cousin's for a visit, and then I shall stay with grandma till Sylvia goes to housekeeping; that will be in the fall, I suppose, and then I shall go

to her. She will need me, for I am sure she will be lonely in a house all day by herself. You don't know my grandmother, do you, Mr. Harwood?"

"No, I think I have never seen her except at Miss Sylvia's wedding."

"She rarely comes into town, but she is quite a wide-awake person. I think that you would find her interesting, and that you would agree on many points, though she does not get along with every one."

"I hardly know whether that is complimentary to me or not, but you quite arouse my curiosity. Will you take me to see her?"

"I should like to. I am going out to spend Sunday night with her. How would you like to go with me and stay to tea? It is not a long walk."

"But a hot one in June. I think we would do better to drive out, if you think my going will not inconvenience Mrs. Wilson."

"No, it will not; she will be very glad to see you and I will send her word that we are coming."

Mr. Harwood had risen and was about to take his leave. "I will not forget the little song," he said, "I will have it ready for you as soon as I can get the time to look up the music. Good-night."

He left her standing on the steps of the porch. Once he looked back as he crossed the street. She was still standing there, her head bent and her hands folded in front of her. "She is a dear little girl," thought Randolph. "She was interested in that forgery matter. I wonder if it was more than an ordinary interest, or if she suspected or knows anything about Bennett's letter."

The next day Bennett came into the office and said: "Ran, I suppose you don't happen to have any paper like that on which the mystery is written."

"No," said Randolph. "Why?"

"Because I thought I would like to make a copy of that letter and give it to Emily. It expresses my sentiments, but I don't like the idea of her possessing a forgery, so I shall give her a bona fide epistle written by myself in place of it,

and I thought if I could find a sheet of the same kind of paper I should like to have it."

"And you'll keep the original forgery?"

"No, I'll tear it up."

"Don't do that; at least not yet. Give it to me." He held out his hand.

"Oh, you cautious old fox. I am not through with it yet."

"But you'll give it to me when you are?"

"Under the promise that you will destroy it before I am married."

"I agree. I think, perhaps, I can discover the writer meantime."

"I shouldn't bother. I'll go up to Stiles's and see if he has any paper like this." He went out, returning in a short time.

"Get it?" asked Randolph.

"Yes, I have a quire of it to spoil." He sat down to his desk and busied himself with copying the letter, which was not a long one. "There," he said when his task was accomplished, "I believe that is a fair copy and it is genuine. Here's the other one for you. Some day you might like to have it for your own personal use,

and I shall not object to your making use of it. I feel better now that it is never to go back to Emily. I will take mine to her this evening. Here, you may as well have a little of this paper, too; it may help you in your detective business. I declare, Ran, I'd rather you'd drop the whole thing. I don't care a rap who wrote it. What is the use of raking up any sort of fuss?"

"Well, I promise not to prosecute my inquiries too far, though I must say the thing interests me, and, as I said before, I wish to steer clear of the fellow who did it."

"Nonsense; it was only a joke, I'll bet, and it's all right, anyhow. You take things too seriously."

Randolph tucked the despised letter away in his pocket and thought no more of the matter for some time. He was really quite willing that it should die out, although he was curious about it, but he had no desire to make any trouble. He found himself looking forward to Sunday with more than usual eagerness. He told himself it was because he would enjoy the experience of meeting such an original character as he knew

Mrs. Wilson to be; but as he drove up before the Ridgely house he felt a thrill of pleasure at the thought of the girl who was to be his companion for the drive.

She came out looking very sweet and fair in her big hat and light dress. Her taste was much simpler than Sylvia's, who for such an occasion would have adorned herself in gorgeous attire.

The way was not long and it was pleasant even in the heat of a summer afternoon. Mrs. Wilson was expecting them and came forward as they drew up before the door. She looked very cool and comfortable in an old-fashioned muslin which showed lavender sprigs on white ground. She was pleased that Nona had brought the young man to see her, and was her brightest, amusing him by her dry wit and her caustic little criticisms of persons and things. It was evident from the first that she took a liking to this friend of her granddaughter's, and she treated him royally in the way of ordering out her best silver and damask and in giving him such a supper as taxed Aunt Hannah's best skill at cooking.

There was much to say of the wedding, and

Mrs. Wilson, even in the presence of this stranger, could not refrain from a casual fling at Sylvia, much to Nona's distress.

"I am afraid your grandmother is a tease," said Mr. Harwood as Nona began to make expostulatory speeches. "Why don't you agree with her, Miss Nona, and that would destroy her fun?"

"I can't," said Nona. "I should have to pretend, and she would find me out at once."

Mrs. Wilson laughed, and excusing herself that she might go in and give her orders, the two young persons were left together out under the trees. The place was beautiful in summer, and in the peaceful shadows of its great trees it was not warm.

"I remembered another stanza to that little song," said Nona, "and if you happen to have it with you I can add it."

"I think I have it here," said her companion, feeling in his pocket for the folded sheet of paper which he drew forth and handed to Nona.

She took it and opened the sheet. Suddenly she turned as white as the paper itself. She handed it back with a shaking hand.

"This is not it," she said tremulously.

He took the proffered page and glanced at it. Uttering a sharp exclamation he was about to put it back in his pocket, but he still held it as he looked for a second sheet which he presently found. He held the two sheets of paper, one in each hand, and compared them; they were exactly alike. On one was written the little poem, on the other the forged letter. Mr. Harwood held out the latter. "Miss Nona," he said, "did you ever see this before?"

She made no answer, but the blood dyed her face scarlet, and she met his eyes appealingly. He repeated his question, looking at her as though he would read her very soul.

"No," she faltered faintly.

He gave a deep sigh, folded the papers and put them both back into his pocket, and then by common consent they went back to the porch to join Mrs. Wilson, who had come out again and was sitting there. Nona was very pale, and Randolph Harwood's face wore its most serious look.

Nona wondered how she could get through

"MISS NONA, DID YOU EVER SEE THIS BEFORE?"

the evening, and was glad when Mr. Harwood took his leave. Their talk had been of commonplace things, and Nona was satisfied to let her grandmother bear the weight of the conversation. "He suspects me, and I must let him," was the thought that continually ran through her mind, so that she heard very little that was said. And as he drove away he said to himself: "Poor little girl, she did it for her sister." He remembered the events of the past winter; Graham's devotion to Sylvia, the sudden change in his attentions, and then the announcement of Sylvia's engagement following so closely that of Emily's. By degrees he connected the chain of circumstances and determined at the last that Nona was guilty. He felt a compassionate longing to help her, but he steeled his heart against all gentle feelings when he remembered the deceit.

As for Nona, she was very miserable and shed bitter tears that night, for she knew that now she had lost the respect of the man she most admired and liked and that she could do nothing to restore his esteem.

CHAPTER VIII

A PLACE OF PEACE

It was more than a month before Nona saw Randolph Harwood again, for the next week she left the town to make a visit to her cousin, Margaret Foster, whose summers were spent in a drowsy old Connecticut village, though in winter with her parents and brother she lived in an apartment in New York. Margaret and Nona had always been good friends and had been roommates at school. When in the dusk of the evening the stage drove up before the white house where the Fosters lived, Margaret was on the sidewalk to welcome her cousin. She was a little body, quick and lively, and full of fun, and Nona knew she was sure of having anything but a stupid time when in her company.

"It is good to see you," she exclaimed; "that is, if it is seeing in this light. Come right in, Jabez will see to your trunk." The

very loquacious stage-driver already had it on his shoulder. He had given Nona all the news of the village during her three miles drive from the railroad station, and as Margaret ushered her into the house, Nona rattled off the various items of information, to Margaret's delight.

"Wouldn't anyone know Jabez Camp had driven you up from the station?" she said; "he is such a talker."

"It was so funny," responded Nona, "to hear all those things about people I never saw. Is it true that the Methodist minister washes his own dishes, and does his wife order him around that way?"

"They say so," returned Margaret laughing, "but I cannot vouch for it. Dear soul, he is the very salt of the earth, and every one loves him. But never mind our neighbors, Nona. Come and have some supper; we saved it for you. Wasn't it too bad that I wasn't able to go to the wedding? If you could have seen my face, all swollen out with mumps, you wouldn't have envied me. Let me see how you look." She held her cousin un-

der the swinging lamp in the hall. "You are too thin and pale. You have been working yourself to death over Sylvia's clothes; I know you have, and then there was all that packing up to be done. But now you shall do nothing but rest and have a good time."

"I am so glad to see you," sighed Nona. "I have been longing for you, Margie. I feel lonely now that Sylvia is married. She did make such a lovely bride."

"I can well imagine it. She did not have a very long engagement, did she?"

"No, not very, but then you know she has known Graham all her life and that makes a difference."

"Oh, of course, though I should rather have been in less of a hurry, but I suppose the breaking up of your home had something to do with it."

"It had nearly everything to do with it. I think Sylvia would not have been in any hurry, otherwise."

"Isn't it good that Maurice is coming up on his vacation while you are here? We'll have no end of fun. Have you seen any of the girls?"

"Not one. How soon we drift apart after we leave school. I really think I should like to go back, Margie."

"I shouldn't. I'd rather take up the studies I like, as I shall do next winter, languages and literature. I am not a 'sassiety lady' to any great extent. I like a good time, but I don't call it a good time to be in a continual ferment over your clothes and to be ruining your complexion by turning green with envy when other girls outdo you in some direction. I like a jolly good crowd of girls and boys with no nonsense about them. Oh, one of our girls is coming up to Ada North's. Lucilla Watson, you know. Do you remember how we used to call her Silly, and how mad it used to make her? She is quite a fine girl, Ada says. I rather hope though, that she will not come while you are here, for I want Ada's brother Julian to devote himself to you while you are here. He is at home this summer from Yale. I am quite curious to see how you will like him. I should think you would be glad to have Sylvia married, for now she cannot monopolize all the beaux. Tell me, is there anyone you like very

much down home?" So Margaret rattled on while Nona ate her supper. It was good to be in the company of this fresh, wholesome girl again. The two had much in common, for they had been comrades at school and for three years had been side by side in their studies and in their school experiences.

Mr. and Mrs. Foster had gone to a neighbor's and so the two girls had an uninterrupted talk. They sat in the open doorway enjoying the coolness. The street with its double row of elms straggled up hill to a graveyard and down again to a brook and at last lost itself in the country road. On each side the way were the white houses so typical of a New England town, with a door in the middle and two windows on each side, a small covered porch before the door and a grass plot in front. The house where the Fosters spent their summers was the home of Mr. Foster's boyhood and he loved to return to it. His wife would have preferred a cottage on the Maine coast, or a country house on Maryland's bay shore, but she yielded to her husband's desire, and had really grown to like the quiet little

town with its oddities. Nona was very fond of this aunt, her father's sister, and always welcomed an invitation to visit her home.

The two girls talked incessantly till they saw Mr. and Mrs. Foster approaching and then they went out to meet them.

"It is Nona," said Mrs. Foster, peering down into her niece's face. "I am so glad you have come, child. We were obliged to go out, for we had promised this evening to an old college mate of your uncle Alvin's."

"I hope you had a good time, Aunt Celia."

"Yes, we did. Mrs. Hoyt was quite serene, for everything went off beautifully."

"That is not usual," said Margaret.

Mrs. Foster laughed. "No, but it happened so on this occasion. We still find this place delightfully amusing, Nona. There were at least half a dozen dear good women in the company who were rejoicing over the fact that a certain convict had served his time and was again among us."

"Why, Aunt Celia, what do you mean?"

"Fact, my dear," returned Mrs. Foster sitting

down on the porch. "He is an Irishman who is a sort of factotum about town, and can be called upon for odd jobs. While in a drunken frenzy he came near killing his old mother; he was sent to jail, and in his absence there was nobody to weed gardens, to whitewash kitchens, to shake carpets, or do like offices, and the town has mourned him sadly. With his return the spirits of the housekeepers have risen and to-morrow will see him booked for more orders than he can fill. We are Arcadian in our simplicity. I assure you it has not changed a particle since you were here four years ago. We can promise you no dances, but we can offer you a church supper once a week. There are four churches and once a month each gives a supper and we go to them all. It is quite an occasion and everyone contributes impartially, be she Methodist, Congregationalist, Episcopalian or Baptist. It saves the housekeepers from preparing that one supper once a week and is a sort of mild festivity when they can meet for a dish of gossip. Only about half a dozen families can get servants, — we had to

bring ours from the city, — and we lend them for the church suppers as we do our dishes and silver, and so you see we are very primitive."

Nona thought so the next day when the neighbor across the street went to the post-office in her gingham apron, and when the minister's dog went trotting complacently by in company with the doctor's fox terrier, each holding a leg of the doctor's trousers in his mouth. One had but to sit on the porch for an hour to be offered endless entertainment, for Margie had some humorous, weird, or pathetic tale to tell of nearly every passer-by.

The neighbors, for all that they sallied forth in their calico gowns and gingham aprons, were bright and interesting with houses full of rare old china and fine pieces of furniture which had descended to them from some way-back ancestors, and Nona grew to like the kindly villagers and their immaculate houses.

However, both she and Margaret were counting upon Maurice's coming for their good time, and when he appeared a day or two later they greeted him joyously. He was a bright, alert,

young fellow four or five years older than Margaret, and having finished his course at college was now in a banking house in New York. He, too, looked at Nona critically. "What have you been doing to yourself, Cousin Nona?" he asked. "You seem too quiet and you don't look up to the mark."

"I am all right," returned Nona, "but you know there have been some exciting times in our family, and I think they have rather worn on me."

"Yes, yes, I know. Sylvia has left you and the old home is sold, and Mrs. Ridgely is going to be married. Quite enough in one year, I should say. Let us take her to New York, Margie, and see if we can't wake her up; she looks too pensive."

"Maybe she's in love," laughed Margaret.

Nona flushed up. "I am not then."

"I half believe it," teasingly persisted Margaret. "You've had that far-away look in your eyes ever since you came."

"Never mind," said Maurice. "Jim Macleod is coming up for his vacation and we'll get up some jolly larks."

He was as good as his word and the next few weeks were very care-free and happy ones for Nona. She felt perfectly at home with these relatives; they were very fond of her and there was no jarring element to disturb the peace. Almost every day a little company of six might be seen starting out on some pleasant excursion. Ada North and her brother Julian, Maurice Foster and his sister, his cousin and his friend made up the party. One day it would be a picnic, another a fishing party, again a trolley ride to some point where supper was to be had or good music was to be heard. Between times there were merry doings at home when the tinkle of a banjo was to be heard or a chorus of college songs waked up the dull little town. To Nona usually fell as escort Julian North, who was a pleasant fellow given to sketching, to taking artistic photographs, and to playing rather well on the organ. Maurice usually paired off with Ada, and to Margaret was left Jim Macleod, a great tall fellow with blond hair and humorous blue eyes. By his side little Margaret looked like a midget, but the two took tramps and drives together while Maurice seemed perfectly well satisfied to devote himself to Ada.

It was one August afternoon that Julian leaned over toward Nona and said in a low voice: "Do you feel like creeping up hill to the graveyard? There is a stunning place to sketch there, and I want to make a photograph of those old apple trees along the wall; they are so picturesque."

Nona nodded. "I'll go."

"You won't have to wear a hat," said Julian. "I'll take an unbrella." They left the others sitting on the porch, Maurice lazily swinging in the hammock, Jim chaffing Margaret who was amusing herself by pelting him with little balls of paper.

"Where are you two going?" she asked. "You must have ambition if you go beyond the sidewalk this hot afternoon."

"We're not going far," Nona told her, "only up to the graveyard."

"Don't fall by the way, then. It will be nice and cool there on top of the hill, if you ever live to get there. She is such a dear," she added as her cousin went off. "There was never anything the least affected or underhanded about Nona. She is as open as the day. I must say I like frankness."

"Miss Margaret, you have gathered a fine crop of freckles this summer, haven't you?" said Jim cheerfully.

Margaret flung an extra large pellet at him. "When I said frankness I didn't mean to the point of brutality," she said. She arose from her place and leaned on the railing of the porch. "They are going at a snail's pace," she said, "and Julian is armed with his camera and sketching things, so they mean to make an afternoon of it."

Nona and Julian were slowly climbing the hill, an effort which brought them some discomfort, for the sun beat down mercilessly and the air was close and sultry.

"Courage, Miss Nona," laughed Julian, "we will rest at the top. I think it is really more than we bargained for. There is not a soul on the street, and look over there, even the domestic labors of the good minister have ceased; he has finished his dishes and is resting under that big tree."

"Dear man," said Nona. "I hope he is happy. He has a book and I hope he enjoys it.

They say his wife is very particular about what he reads. Let us hope this is not stolen fruit, and that it is too warm for her to descend upon him and rob him of it." But just then they heard a sharp voice striking the still air. "William, where are you?"

"Here, dear," came in mild tones from the minister.

Mrs. Dickson in a lanky calico gown appeared at the door, her thin form appearing thinner because of the lightness of her attire. She looked this way and that and the couple traveling up the hill saw the minister slip his volume into his pocket and rise from his seat under the tree.

"Now, there," exclaimed Nona in a tone of commiseration, "he will have no more rest; she has spoiled his quiet hour. I wish some one would suppress her. She is too much for my endurance."

"That good man follows too closely to the beatitude: 'Blessed are the meek,'" laughed Julian. "If he would get mad and throw something at her just once, he'd have a better chance of inheriting the earth. As it is, he isn't al-

lowed to possess even a comfortable corner of it in peace. Our goal is in sight, Miss Nona; here is the stile."

They left the street and climbed the stile, to find themselves in the ancient graveyard whose headstones, gray with age, leaning this way and that, bore some strange inscriptions. Startling death's heads or remarkable cherubs were the favorite devices upon the stones, and the quaint inscriptions set forth the virtues of the Concurrences and Waitstills and Noahdiahs who two full centuries before had been laid to rest there. Pausing often to read the epitaphs, Julian and Nona climbed the slope and at last rested in the shade of the appletrees which bordered the low stone wall. The ripe sweetings were already falling to the ground, and the two began munching the juicy fruit warm from lying in the sun. A breathless heat seemed poised above the earth; the grasshoppers chirped in the dry grass, and once in a while came the echo of a voice sounding far off.

"Was there ever such utter quiet?" said Julian. "I think these dear departed must find

this a pleasant spot to rest their bones, for no doubt theirs was a strenuous life."

"It certainly does suggest a very ideal resting place," returned Nona. "Are you going to make a sketch?"

"I think I will take some photographs first; the light for sketching will be better a little later in the afternoon. Sit just where you are. I like that position and the stone wall will make a good background." The taking of the photographs occupied some time and then Julian started to work on his sketch. It was much cooler here on top of the hill, and Nona leaned back against the old wall, dreamily resting her eyes on the scene before her, while Julian worked away rapidly. "This is quite in character," he said. "I really think your friends might be able to recognize it. I will give it to you if it turns out well."

"I'd love to have it, and it is very good of you to offer it."

"Do you happen to know Randolph Harwood?" said Julian, holding off his sketch at arm's length. "He has gone to your town within the past year or so."

"Yes, I know him," Nona replied curtly.

"He is a cousin of mine," Julian went on, dipping his brush into his cup of water. "He was at the law school when I first went to college and he was very good to me. I don't know a more correct fellow than Ran. I used to tell him that he was too uncompromising, but I suppose one can't be too rigid in the matter of principle. I used to say that he was too particular for a lawyer, and that always made him mad. 'As if there were no such thing as an honest lawyer,' he would say."

"I can imagine he would be uncompromising," Nona said thoughtfully.

"Then you must know him rather well."

"Rather well, yes. We sang together sometimes."

"That reminds me, suppose we stop at the church on our way home and you can sing while I play. I have always wanted to have you do that. Will you?"

"I think I would like that. How is your sketch coming on?"

"Fairly well. I don't know but that it is about

as good as any I have done lately. There, I will not keep you any longer. You have been sitting quite long enough and certainly deserve a reward, so if this is worth anything to you please take it."

Nona was about to express her thanks when there was a sound of rumbling thunder and before Julian could pack up his traps the big drops of rain were falling fast. "It is fortunate we have an umbrella," said Julian. "We'll run for the church; it is only a shower, I think."

They hastened toward the stile and made for the little Episcopal church just beyond. Leaving Nona on the porch, Julian went for the keys. He soon returned, accompanied by a small boy, who agreed for a quarter to help out by blowing the bellows of the organ for them.

For an hour Julian played and Nona sang in the dimly-lighted church. Overhead the thunder rolled and the lightning flashed, but these were scarcely noticed by the man who, like themselves, had sought refuge from the storm and who was sitting in the body of the church listening. Where had he heard such a pure, sweet

contralto? It soothed and comforted him, for he was not happy. At last a burst of sunshine lighted up the stained glass window, and threw a gleam upon the cross in the chancel. The man arose and went to the door, but he had not stepped forth into the street before Julian appeared, coming face to face in the bright sunlight with Randolph Harwood.

"Well, well," cried Julian, "if this isn't a surprise. Where did you come from, Ran? I was talking to Miss Nona about you not an hour ago. Come out, Miss Nona; the rain is over. You know Miss Ridgely, Ran."

Nona came forward out of the dim church, and Mr. Harwood bowed, but did not offer his hand. "I hardly expected to see you, Miss Ridgely," he said distantly. "I knew you were in Connecticut, but I didn't know just where."

"Where did you come from, Ran," repeated Julian.

"I had a little business up this way, and thought I would run over to see you all. I concluded not to wait for the stage and walked over."

"This hot afternoon?"

"I was fortunate to get a lift from a man coming along to a place just beyond the town, but I ran in here from the storm. How is cousin Adelaide?"

"Very well. She will be delighted to see you. Will you come with us? I am going back with Miss Nona."

"I think I will go at once to your house."

"Then I will join you later," said Julian.

"Don't mind about me," Nona began to say.

Julian looked at her with a smile. "But I want to mind," he returned. "I'd rather go than not. You don't forbid it?" His winning smile was in sharp contrast to Randolph's reserve, and Nona smiled back at him. So they left Randolph to pursue his way alone, and went on together.

CHAPTER IX

SUMMER FRIENDS

Mr. Harwood remained in the village for the next two or three days, and although he did not avoid Nona, he treated her with an indifference he had hitherto never shown her. She knew the reason, but in spite of it she could not but feel indignant.

"I thought you and Mr. Harwood were quite good friends," said Margaret. "You have mentioned him so often in your letters, but he certainly is indifferent and hardly ever talks to you. Maybe he is jealous of Julian."

"Nonsense," said Nona. "He talks to me quite as much as I talk to him, I am sure."

"I don't care, I don't like the way he acts," returned Margaret. And consequently she turned a cold shoulder on the young man who had been quite disposed to like her. Yet, whenever she did allow him a conversation with her she inva-

riably turned the subject upon Nona, whose praises she sang with such fidelity that it set Randolph wondering. It pleased him to hear what she had to say, and yet he was most unhappy, for the very discovery of what he believed to be Nona's fraud had shown him how deeply he was interested in her. Over and over again he had compared the two sheets of paper, and one day shortly after Nona's departure from home he went to Stiles's, the stationer, and inquired for a paper of a like kind.

"There seems to be a run on this paper lately," said Mr. Stiles, rummaging on his shelves. "I've only a little left. I don't keep much of it in stock, for I got it for Miss Nona Ridgely in the first place, and she is about the only one who uses that particular kind. She likes it better than some of the newer kinds, she says. I sold some to Mr. Duvall, but I don't believe anyone else ever got any, for I don't show it unless I am asked about it. I've so much other paper that I must sell out because it is a novelty, and fashions change in paper just as they do in dry goods."

It seemed to Randolph as if fate had thrust

proofs in his way. He had not asked for a history of the paper and yet it was volunteered him by the talkative shopkeeper. He bought a small quantity and went out more than ever convinced that Nona was guilty. He missed her; he longed to see her, and yet he was miserable whenever he thought of her, and it was partly to get away from the constant reminder of her that he took his holiday, and having a little matter of business to attend to in New Haven, his old College town, he started away only at last to be thrown into Nona's company. He knew by the sudden color which sometimes flamed into her face when he looked at her that she was conscious of his censuring thoughts and he felt that she tried to avoid him. It hurt him to see that she could seem at any time gay and happy and on such good terms with his cousin Julian, and yet he would not have it otherwise. On account of all this he was very miserable, more so than Nona, who at least had the satisfaction of knowing that she merited no blame, whatever appearances might indicate.

It was only when he parted from her that his feelings overcame his judgment. He met her

one evening as she was coming from the post-office, where she had gone to mail a letter. Overhead the broad-spreading elms rustled softly, and the twinkling lights up and down the street seemed few and far between because of the dense leafage. Randolph stood still and waited Nona's approach as he saw her coming up the street. "It is you," he said, stepping up to her. "I want to say good-bye. I am going to-morrow. Will you walk a little with me?"

She looked up surprised. He had not volunteered his company before since his arrival in the town. "I will go a little way," she answered.

He placed her hand upon his arm, his own resting upon it for a moment. "I wanted to say good-bye," he repeated. "Have you any message to send your grandmother?"

"My love, that is all I will burden your remembrance with."

"And I shall tell her that you are well and happy? You are happy?"

"Yes, I think so. I am with those who love and trust me," she replied gravely.

He looked down at her. "And I do not trust

you, you mean. How can I? How can I? Would to heaven I could. Oh, you poor little child, I wonder if you realize what it all involves."

"Yes, I think I know all it involves," she said firmly. "I do not ask you to trust me."

"I know there was some excuse. I know why you made the sacrifice, but I think it was a mistake. One cannot do evil that another may receive good, believing that it is no harm, for the evil will leave its stain."

Nona winced. "I know that. I know all you can tell me. It has been said that you are uncompromising, and yet I do not blame you for being so. There is no excuse for wrong-doing, and I do not ask for your faith, nor do I offer any excuse or explanation."

"We might at least have been friends."

"Yes, we might have been. I have felt that, too."

"When I heard you singing in the church, I cannot tell you how it affected me. I said that is the voice of one who is true and noble and good. I could not believe —"

"No, you could not believe," returned Nona withdrawing her hand from his arm.

"If there were only some way out of it; if only I might have your word that it was not you but some one else, anything but that I must know that it was you who did so wrong a thing. If there were only some explanation beyond that which seems to be the true one. You do not deny that you did it for your sister?"

Nona gave a quick gasp. "I do not deny anything."

"Your secret is safe with me. No one, not even Bennett, shall ever know, and here I destroy the only proof, for Bennett has made a copy for Emily; he would have it so." With a quick gesture he drew the fatal letter from his pocket. It seems that he must keep it there constantly, was Nona's thought. He struck a match and touched it to the paper and when it was nearly consumed he dropped the last fragment into the little brook which flowed beneath the bridge on which they were standing. "No one shall ever know," he repeated; "that is the end of it so far as anyone else is concerned, but for us there can be no end," he said sadly.

"There can be no end," the words haunted Nona, yet she felt a great relief when she knew that the letter was destroyed. It was like Bennett to desire Emily to possess only that which was written by himself, and half the shame of the affair seemed to disappear when she knew that there was now no forgery in existence. "Thank you for doing that," she said. "I am glad, very glad that dreadful thing no longer exists, and that Emily has only a true writing from Bennett's own hand, yet as you say, there is no end for me,— for us. I can make no explanations; you will always have to believe just what you do now. There is no other thing to say."

Both were silent for a little while. They watched the brook leaping over the stones below them. Nona's slender hand rested on the railing of the bridge. Presently Randolph laid his on it. "I am your friend," he said. "I am at least that. I was too uncompromising. You were so young, such a child, how could you have realized? You may have thought, no doubt you did think, that you were doing nobly for Sylvia's sake. I cannot feel as I did toward you;

something does not let me. I could almost trust you if it were not for the proofs. Will you let me be your friend in spite of it all? I cannot give you up."

Nona did not answer for a moment. She had rebelled against the denunciation of herself, yet she knew that he was not to blame. She would accept the friendship, little comfort as it might bring, for she, too, realized that she could not give him up. "If you think you can be my friend; if you can be that without trusting me, I accept the olive branch," she told him. "Considering everything, I should thank you for offering it. I do thank you."

He held her hand in both of his for a moment, and then he dropped it, and they turned and walked slowly away. As they neared the house they met Julian. "I was looking for you," he told Nona. "Everyone has been wondering what had become of you."

"I met Miss Ridgely and persuaded her to take a little walk; it is such a beautiful night," said Mr. Harwood.

"Oh, that was it, was it?" Julian seemed a

little surprised and not over-pleased. "You will sing for me, won't you?" he said to Nona. "I have been haunted all evening by that last song you sang at church this afternoon, and I want to hear it again. Will you sing it for me?"

"Certainly," Nona replied.

Mr. Harwood turned abruptly away. "Good-night and good-bye," he said. "I have already made my adieu to the others, so I will go home to cousin Adelaide, Julian." And Julian, nothing loath, carried Nona off, while Randolph with a great pain tugging at his heart saw her go. "Do I consider myself so much better than that boy that I stand aloof from her and let him win her sweetness and loveliness? Every word she speaks; every glance of her eye; every line of her face speaks honesty and yet I must lose her because of my inflexible judgment of her. I am forced to accuse her against my own will and yet, Heaven knows, I love her," he said to himself as he watched her light dress flutter in at her cousin's door. In spite of his intention, he retraced his steps and paced up and down the street before the house, and presently Nona's

voice rang out clear and full of pathos. It seemed to have gained a new quality since he first heard it; there was such soul and feeling in it and it thrilled him completely. But the pain of it all was deeper still when the song ceased and he saw the girl, accompanied by Julian, disappear into the garden. He realized that here was another only too glad to cherish what he had scorned, and the knowledge of it did not help his case.

"Well," said Margaret to Nona, when the two went up stairs, "I for one am glad that Mr. Harwood has gone. He was no addition to our crowd except that he sang well. What induced you to walk with him, Nona?"

"He asked me and — we are friends, you know."

"I thought you were not very good friends, you never acted as if you were."

"Yes, we are now; we weren't, maybe."

"Oh, you'd had a quarrel, was that it? All the same I am glad he is gone, though perhaps his having troubles of his own made him so glum."

Nona did not respond, although she, too, was

glad that Mr. Harwood had gone. She realized that Fate had treated her unkindly in arranging it so that this one man, of all others, must suspect her of an act from which her whole soul recoiled, yet she was thankful that the secret was in his hands and not in those of some other who would make it common talk. There was this barrier between them which would make it forever impossible for her to feel at ease when with him, though she realized but for that she might have been the one woman in the world for him and that he might have been her prince; but love in its dawn was clouded over. Yes, it was a relief to have him go, for now she could give herself up to the pleasure of her visit. Julian was now her shadow, and indeed the pairing off of the three couples was taken as a matter of course. Margaret and Jim, brimming over with fun, were forever chaffing each other and starting up some absurdity which was entertainment for the others. Maurice and Ada were more serious but not less fond of one another's society, while Julian and Nona had their seasons of music and took long rambles, each armed with a camera.

"I'll give you some lessons in sketching," Julian had said one day, and Nona, who already drew quite well, was eager for the instruction, so the two discoursed wisely about distance and atmosphere and values to the despair of the rest. Julian was given to having desperate affairs with the girls he met, and, having passed safely through several violent love affairs, was not considered to be dangerously attacked.

"He's lots of fun," Margaret told Nona, "but don't fall in love with him, for it is 'out of sight, out of mind' with him. Two or three of us have had our day and Julian is still very young, so you can imagine what must be expected before he settles down."

Nona laughed. "I am not in danger, Margie, but he is lots of fun, as you say, and I am having a good time."

"All right, my child," returned Margaret. "I just thought I would warn you."

"Thank you for your consideration. I think I shall live through the summer without making you a scene," though indeed if her heart had not already been touched it is quite likely that she

would have been fascinated by Julian, who was good at many things, love-making included.

The day after Mr. Harwood's departure, the two started off to sketch, and found a romantic spot down by the border of the brook. Julian was more devoted in his manner than ever, for he had been piqued by Nona's walking off with his cousin the evening before, and they were no sooner established than he began to make love in his most ardent manner.

Nona only laughed at him. "What did we come here for, to sketch or to be sentimental?" she asked.

"I don't know what you came for," replied Julian, "but I came for the sake of being alone with you."

"What shall I use for that distance," said Nona, ignoring the remark, "rose madder and cobalt? Or shall I put some yellow in it?"

Julian looked at her water-color block. "Put in a little yellow," he said, "and at the same time put some warmth into your manner."

"I don't wish to put any warmth into my manner this summer day. I don't need it."

"I do; I am freezing with your coldness."

"'Ain't it a shame,'" Nona began humming the coon-song.

"I say," said Julian; "that is too much."

"What? Too much yellow? Shall I use the blue or the madder?"

"I shall be mad, madder, maddest if you don't listen to me."

"If you make such atrocious puns I shall pack up and go home. There are limits to my endurance, much as I enjoy this sylvan spot. Please don't do that again."

"I won't if you will only promise to listen to me."

"I will listen when you say anything worth hearing."

"Is it not worth your hearing when I tell you that I lay my heart at your feet?"

Nona calmly held off her sketch to mark the effect of distance. "You silly thing," she said, "do you suppose I don't know that what you say has no more meaning than the empty rattle of a window in a high wind, or — no not so much as the tinkle of this brook over the pebbles, for that

is poetry and your remarks are too vacuous to be anything so pleasing."

"You are dreadfully hard on me. I never had a girl talk so to me," said Julian, looking at her with languishingly reproachful eyes.

"Except Margie," returned Nona. "I'll venture to say she did, when you said the same things to her."

"Oh, she has been telling you that."

"What?"

"That I said the same things to her."

"You hadn't said the same things when I saw her last, but I know you must have said them a great many times or you wouldn't do it so glibly."

"You are a finished coquette, Miss Ridgely," said Julian with dignity.

Nona laughed merrily. "I'd like my sister to hear that. She couldn't believe her ears. I wish you would tell her if you ever see her."

Julia looked discomfited. All his pretty speeches and his usual methods fell flat on this occasion, and it was not his ordinary experience. "You have a heart of ice," he sighed.

"If I have I ought to be much cooler than I

am at this present moment," she responded serenely. "I wish you would hurry up and begin your sketch. I can do so much better when I watch you for a while, although I suppose my own very original treatment is maybe better for me. I don't know, though; I learn a lot by looking on."

"If you would only let me teach you other things," said Julian in melting tones.

"What, for example ?"

"The language of love."

"Julian North, I wish you wouldn't be so awfully soft. We had such real good times before you took up this pose. I don't wish to listen to such idiotic things, but what I do wish to know is how to do those tree trunks."

"If I teach you, will you give me the payment I ask?"

"I'll give you my sketch," laughed Nona. "I can't think of anything more valuable that I could offer."

"Ah, but you could give me something by the giving of which you would be no loser and I an infinite gainer. Bestow of your largess, oh my heart's queen."

"Bestow some of your advice in the matter of pigments, oh my silly friend."

"I ask but one thing; it is so simple, so little, so worthless to you."

"What is this thing of so little value? It can't be my heart, for I value that organ highly."

"It is but one kiss."

"Thank you, I reserve my lips for the man I love, and whom I shall promise to marry."

"And it is not I whom you love? Oh fortunate man on whom you have bestowed your heart!"

"It isn't you nor anybody, but when he comes I shall have a whole heart to give him and not one so fractured and chipped and put together with the cement of time that it will not be worth anything, and that is the way yours is. Do be sensible, Julian, and let us drop all this moony, spoony, luny talk. Please do be sensible."

"Miss Nona, really and honestly, you don't know how I adore you."

"No, I don't."

"You don't believe me."

"I believe you have a sort of mild summer madness which you dignify by the name of love, and which seems to attack you so often that you ought to know it will be cured as soon as I go away and some other girl comes along."

"It's very real while it lasts," sighed Julian lugubriously.

Nona laughed. "That's pretty good. You admit that it doesn't last with you; but suppose I were to take you seriously, it might last with me and do me infinite harm. Please, Julian, be a good boy and let us be jolly good comrades as we were at first. You know perfectly well that you would be sorry to bring any grief to me or to any girl. I think when I love I will not get over it at once."

"But this might be the real thing with me; one never knows," persisted Julian.

"Then don't you think it would be wiser to wait and find out?"

"But I don't want it to be the real thing unless I know I am the man for you."

"Oh, you are dreadful. You could'nt help it if it should happen to be, so don't talk about it any more."

"But you do bid me hope?"

"I bid you do nothing but behave yourself like a reasonable creature and stop this nonsense. I will tell you one thing: if you talk this way once again, I shall leave you that minute, I don't care where we are, so there. Now, will you behave yourself?"

"I will, if you must have it so."

"Then please begin your sketch."

And Julian meekly obeyed, knowing Nona to be a person who meant what she said.

CHAPTER X

BETWEEN TWO FIRES

During the rest of Nona's visit Julian had frequent lapses from his sensible state, as Nona called it, but she resolutely kept her word by leaving him the moment he began his sentimental speeches so that he finally accepted the position of comrade and Nona told him that then she liked him very much, and that she was truly sorry when the time came for her to go. "It has been lovely," she said to Margaret; "I don't believe I ever had a better time in my life."

"Please stay then," begged her cousin.

"I wish I could, but grandma has counted on my spending the rest of the summer with her, and I cannot disappoint her."

"We three who are left behind will be desolate," sighed Margaret, "though I am glad you will have the company of Maurice and Jim as far

as New York. I don't know what we shall do with Julian; I hope he will not do anything desperate.'"

"No fear of that," laughed Nona. "Didn't you say his sister was expecting Lucilla Watson? I don't doubt but that Julian will find his consolation in her."

"You're a funny girl, Nona; most girls would have taken him seriously, and would either have fallen in love with him or have flirted as desperately as he did."

"But you see I was forewarned."

"That doesn't always have an effect. Girls are so willing to believe what a man says to them. Each one seems to like to deceive herself into believing she is *the* one when a man makes love to her whether he means it or not. What did you say when he asked you to kiss him? I know he did."

"I told him I reserved my lips for the man I should marry. What did you say?"

"I got mad, but yours was the better answer. I believe ever so many girls will allow a man to kiss them because they don't know how to refuse

and don't like to be called cold and distant. It is very silly, I know, but it is so, for girls have told me. I believe many times the men just act so to see what a girl will say, and don't really mean to anger her."

"I think a girl has a right to feel indignant and to show that she is. I was indignant with Julian and he knew it, and apologized very meekly. As if it were not much better to be considered cold than to lose a man's respect. I know the girls at school used to tell all sorts of tales, but I thought them hard to believe. I know there were some among them who flouted the girls who wanted to keep their self-respect, and would ridicule anything like real dignity. I remember how it shocked me when I heard one of them laugh at another's high standards."

"I know whom you mean," returned Margaret, "and I consider a girl like that does no end of harm. It is impossible to tell how far her influence for evil may extend. Isn't it too bad that she can exert such an influence? But I know she does. The poor, silly younger girls follow her lead and get into no end of trouble by doing so.

I might have done the same only mamma saw through her at once. You know I was fascinated by Lottie and had her home for a visit one Christmas. Well, Maurice 'sized her up,' as he says, and mamma, too, and though we did all we could to make her have a good time, she was never invited again, and mamma was so sweet and just in her talk to me about her, but she opened my eyes in time, for just then, Nona, I was disposed to be rather a frivolous creature, and everything attracted me that seemed gay and sensational, or that meant any sort of fun. But you, dear thing, never did care for her, and yet you never said a word. I didn't realize then how good you were to stick by me and help me out of harm's way as you did lots of times."

It was pleasant for Nona to feel that Margaret recognized all this, for it had been rather a pull to get her from Lottie Draper's influence, and Nona had made many a sacrifice of time and inclination for Margaret's sake. "I wish you could go back with me," she said wistfully to her cousin.

"And I wish you could stay here, but you'll

come again next year, though I cannot promise you Julian a second season; he has never yet been that constant."

Nona laughed. "I shall not ask it of you, though I really do think that Julian enjoys our comradeship, and I have promised to write to him, for when he isn't silly we are really very congenial and we get along finely."

Nona had been putting the last things into her trunk and now Jabez Camp came clumping up the steps for it and the stage was at the door. It was occupied this morning entirely by Nona and her friends, not being very large, and when the adieux to Mr. and Mrs. Foster had been made, they started off at a lively gait.

The travellers left Margaret, Ada and Julian waving good-byes from the platform of the station, and Nona felt that the most peaceful and agreeable part of the summer was gone. Yet she felt a satisfaction in having such pleasant travelling companions as her cousin Maurice and his friend Jim, and she did not find the journey to New York at all wearisome, for what girl does not like to have two agreeable young men

as travelling companions? She did not stop in New York, but hurried on that she might reach her grandmother's before dark. As she approached her native town, she felt a little sinking of heart. Home was home no longer; Sylvia was now Sylvia Waters, and here awaited her appeals from her sister, caustic speeches from her grandmother, and distrust from the man who, while her avowed friend, could not believe in her.

Sylvia was at the station to meet her and insisted upon bearing her away to the boarding house where she was staying. "But grandma expects me," said Nona. "There is Thad now."

"Oh well, never mind. I have such loads to tell you, and I have been counting on having you this evening. Send Thad back with your trunk and stay in town till morning. I know Mrs. Cowman can put you up."

Nona hesitated. She did wish very much to stay, but she had written that she would be at her grandmother's that evening, and she knew the preparations that would be made for her, and that it would mean a great disappointment to Mrs. Wilson if she failed to appear.

"I do wish ever so much to stay," she said. "Oh, you dear, you are lovelier than ever, and I am dying to hear all about your wedding trip, but I must go to grandma; she is expecting me and I promised."

"And so have I been expecting you. I have just counted on having you this first evening."

"But I did not promise you, and I did promise grandma."

"Oh well, if it pleases you better to be with her, of course I have not a word to say. I suppose now that I am married I shall be of no earthly account to you."

"Oh Sylvia, how can you? I will come in the first thing in the morning; just as soon as I can get away."

"You needn't hurry yourself," returned Sylvia coldly. And Nona, feeling dispirited and sad, climbed into the old carriage which her grandmother had sent for her.

To be sure Mrs. Wilson's welcome was all that it should be, for she recognized and appreciated Nona's promptness. "I was afraid they might

persuade you to stay longer," she said, "but I am glad you didn't wish to disappoint your old granny. Did you see Sylvia?"

"Yes, she was at the station to meet me."

"And I'll venture to say she would have kept you."

"Well, yes, but you see I didn't stay," returned Nona smiling, "though I promised to go in early to-morrow to hear all about the wedding trip."

"Thad can take you in as well as not. That old horse ought to have more exercise and you can use him all you wish to. I think maybe you and I can take some jaunts together."

"That will be fine," replied Nona heartily.

All of Nona's belongings had been taken to her grandmother's, and such other furniture as was not Mrs. Ridgely's own was stored away for Sylvia's use when she should go to housekeeping. Therefore when Nona went up to her room it seemed very familiar to her, for there stood her desk, her favorite chair, and a little work-table she had always used. Upon the walls

hung her book-shelves and the pictures which had adorned her room at home. Her grandmother watched her face anxiously, and the girl turned around and smiled at her. "How natural it all looks."

"Are they in their right places?" asked Mrs. Wilson. "I didn't know. But you can change them, Nona, if you wish."

"I think they are just right, and you are very good to have them all ready for me."

"I wish you to be so happy here, Nona, that you will never care to leave," said the old lady wistfully.

Nona put an arm around her. "It will not be for lack of comfort, grandma, and I promise to see much more of you than I ever have done, except when Sylvia needs me."

"Sylvia —" began her grandmother, but she checked herself. She did not intend to drive Nona away by abusing her sister. "I have had several visits from your friend, Mr. Harwood," she said to change the subject. "He has been coming out nearly every Sunday to take tea with me."

"He knows where he will get a good supper," said Nona laughing.

"He told me he had been up there in Connecticut, in that queer old town. Did he go especially to see you, Nona?"

"Oh no, he has cousins there. He didn't know I was in the town till he came upon me unawares. He stayed only a few days."

"I like him," said Mrs. Wilson meditatively.

"He seems a little stern to some persons," said Nona quietly. "Margaret Foster does not fancy him."

"I suppose he may have had a reason for seeming stern to her; perhaps he did not fancy her."

"Oh, but he did. He took quite a fancy to her, as who wouldn't. Everybody likes Margie. I had a fine time, grandma. I must tell you all about it."

Mrs. Wilson looked pleased. "Come now, down to supper; it must be ready, and you shall tell me all about your doings." She was so happy at having Nona with her that she spared no pains to make it pleasant, having Nona's favorite

batter bread on the table and all the other things she could think of to tempt the girl's appetite, and altogether she was so bright and entertaining that Nona wondered how she could ever have dreaded to be with her grandmother.

But the next morning by nine o'clock she was ready to start for town, and although Sylvia was at first disposed to be a little offish she was too eager to pour forth her account of her travels to retain that attitude for very long, and so the two had a good talk, though Nona's own experiences had little place in the conversation. It was not likely that her marriage would improve Sylvia, for her husband was neither strong nor wise, and speedily discovering that he could get his way, and at any time soothe Sylvia's ruffled feelings by flattery, he consequently gave her flattery morning, noon and night.

Nona had been living in a different atmosphere, and as she left her sister she felt appalled to think how little she had really enjoyed being with her. Yet she was deeply interested in all Sylvia's affairs and told herself that her sister must naturally be absorbed in her husband and

her future home, and that it was herself who was selfish in expecting more sympathy in her own interests. "She will be different after a while; it is all so new to her," she said to herself as she went out to the carriage in which Mrs. Wilson sat waiting for her. Nona had asked Sylvia to go down to speak to her grandmother, but she had refused. "She'll only say something disagreeable," she had declared. "I don't see how you can stand her, Nona. I wish you would come in here and board with us at this house."

"But I couldn't afford that, Sylvia. Mamma says that what I have will give me enough for my expenses outside of board, but if I came here, I shouldn't have anything left; and that would be rather inconvenient, besides when grandma really wants me, I don't see why I shouldn't stay."

"Oh well, I suppose you do have to for the present, but it will not be very long before I have you to myself. I don't see why you are in such a hurry. Why can't you wait till Graham comes home? I want to tell you more about the house."

"I will hear it another time. I must not keep

grandma waiting. We'll have lovely times talking about the house. I am crazy to help you get into it."

"Well," was Mrs. Wilson's greeting, "I suppose you have heard just how often the queen sneezed, and how many compliments were paid her, and how becoming this was, and what somebody said about that."

"Now, grandma," expostulated Nona, taking the reins, "I wish you wouldn't."

"I know you do, and I suppose I am an old wretch to say such things, but I don't seem to be able to help it. I'll try to be agreeable. Is Sylvia looking well?"

"She looks perfectly lovely. I don't wonder Graham is proud of her."

"Why didn't she come down?"

"She was just going to dress for dinner. She and Graham have about decided upon the house they will take."

"I wonder what sort of housekeeper Sylvia will make," began Mrs. Wilson, but she broke off short. "Nona, there is Mr. Harwood; I want to speak to him. Drive over there."

Nona reluctantly directed the horse toward the spot where Mr. Harwood stood, and he came forward to speak to them. "Will you get out, Mrs. Wilson? Ah, Miss Ridgely, you are back again?"

"Yes, I came yesterday."

"I hope you left my cousins well."

"Quite well." And that was all that passed between the two. Mrs. Wilson had some questions to ask about certain business matters, and the talk was chiefly of that, but as they were driving away Mrs. Wilson said: "You'll come out as usual on Sunday, Mr. Harwood?"

He glanced quickly at Nona. "If I may," he said hesitatingly.

"Of course you may. Why not?" But Nona said not a word as she gathered up the lines and drove off.

"I don't think you were very cordial to Mr. Harwood," said her grandmother.

"But you were," returned Nona smiling, "and that was enough."

She did not make her appearance for some time after Mr. Harwood's arrival on Sunday. In

spite of the fact that she had told him that she was willing that they should be friends, she constantly resented the position that must cause her to feel conscious and constrained when in his presence. There was no help for it, but why should she, who was perfectly innocent, be obliged to suffer from the suspicion of any man? Better become strangers, and let him go his way while she would cling closer to those who loved her and who had no censorious judgment to pass upon her. Yet she turned more than once to see that she was becomingly dressed before she went down-stairs. She gave the visitor a cool greeting, and sat silent and preoccupied, leaving him to talk to her grandmother. She affected not to look at him, but was more than once conscious that his eyes were upon her. Once or twice he made an effort to draw her into the conversation, but she avoided this. At last her grandmother left them for a few moments and he came over to where she was sitting.

"I thought we were to be friends," he said.

"Well, are we not?" she answered coolly.

He sat down near her. "I did not think you appeared rejoiced to see your friend."

Nona made an impatient gesture. "There is no use pretending, Mr. Harwood. I don't see how we can be friends under the circumstances. We are uncomfortable in each other's presence. I am conscious that you sit in judgment upon me, and you feel that you are magnanimous in offering a friendship which it is hard for you to feel."

"Oh, not that." He spoke sharply. "I do not feel that I am magnanimous; you mistake me, Miss Nona. If you were to say that I am unhappy in your presence, you would be nearer the truth."

"Then why need we meet?"

"We need not, if it would please you better."

"Oh, it isn't that; it is the falseness of the thing that I mind, the pretence," she said earnestly.

He looked at her with a troubled countenance. "You suffer because of my condemnation of your act and yet you cannot bear pretence. Are you then by nature as honest as you seem, and was

that the one false note in your otherwise lovely nature? I am beginning to think so, Nona."

She turned away her head. "Whatever you think, I am powerless to prevent, but that I am not comfortable where you are is a fact, and I think I would rather not force a friendship upon you when I believe it is of little value to you, and — I am so tired of it all." She spoke wearily.

Her companion put his hand over his eyes and sat plunged in deep thought. "I am afraid I seem a very rigid and harsh judge to you. I do not wonder that you are weary of all this. I am to blame for bringing it continually before you. I, who am so far from perfect, have no right to say one word to you that could give a moment's unhappiness to you. What right have I to condemn you? Will you forgive me for having instituted myself your judge, and so hard a one toward so sweet a sinner? I am beginning to see things differently. Please believe that in the future, if you still think you can sometimes see me as a friend, there will be in my heart nothing but gentle feeling toward you. I will not again re-

fer to this subject. It shall be as if it had never happened. I determined that it should be so when I last saw you. I knew then that I could not lose you out of my life."

"I do not believe," said Nona unsteadily, "that you willingly condemn me, but I know you cannot help it. I have wanted to ask you what is that proof of which you spoke?"

He told her of the paper that he had found at Stiles's and of what the stationer had said. "And yet," he said, "I ought to know that it is mere circumstantial evidence; if you once gave me your word —"

"But I do not give it," said Nona interrupting him sharply. "I leave it all, circumstantial evidence, proofs, what you will, for you to believe as you choose."

"Then let us never again speak of it. Let all be as it was before this occurred. Will you?"

"I will try."

"Thank you. Is your piano here? Will you sing for me?"

"Sylvia has our piano. The one here was my mother's; it is rather old and worn but it

still has a better tone than many that one hears. Yes, I will sing for you."

"And with me?"

"Yes." She spoke hesitatingly.

"Please." He asked imploringly and Nona saw that he honestly meant to put behind them all that unfortunate affair of the letter.

CHAPTER XI

IN SYLVIA'S HOME

By the first of October Sylvia was settled in her own home. For some time before this Nona had been between two fires, for, though her grandmother was willing to allow her a reasonable amount of time to give to her sister, Sylvia demanded an unreasonable amount, and it must be confessed that Nona found it more interesting and exciting to help Sylvia get her pretty little home in order than she did to stay at the quiet farm where the homely details of country life chiefly absorbed her grandmother. To be sure she and Sylvia had their squabbles, for Sylvia was so impractical as to bring forth chidings from Nona which were taken in ill part. It went against Nona's sense of fitness to see her sister spend so much on lace curtains that she had nothing left for kitchen utensils, and to witness an extravagant outlay in table linen when there were

matresses still to be bought, and it is doubtful if things would have gone as well as they did but for Nona's prudent curbing of her sister's extravagant tendencies.

At last when the house was habitable and Sylvia had fairly established herself, came the tug of war for Nona. Mrs. Wilson declared absolutely that Nona should not leave her, and when Nona reminded her that it had been the arrangement all along that she should live with Sylvia, and that she had never promised her grandmother to remain permanently with her, Mrs. Wilson stormed and scolded and at last drove furiously into town and descended upon Sylvia in the midst of her satisfied survey of her surroundings. Then there was a scene and Sylvia was left in tears, while Mrs. Wilson, half ashamed of her sharp and really unwarranted attack, drove home to discover that the bone of contention was not to be found, for Nona had taken the matter into her own hands and had followed her grandmother to town, waiting at Emily Griscom's till she should have finished her interview, and then going to Sylvia's as soon as she saw her grandmother drive by.

Sylvia, all tears, reproaches, and hurt feelings, was not easily mollified, but when Nona assured her that she had come to stay, she was ready to triumph over her grandmother's discomfiture and had Nona established without delay in the pretty little room she had specially prepared for her.

But when evening came and Sylvia gave herself up to Graham's society, Nona thought with some misgivings of her grandmother alone there in the old farm-house with no one but servants, and she wondered if she were doing right to forsake her. However with the morning these compunctions fled, for there was so much to talk about and to do that the girl did not have time for regrets, and as Sylvia assured her that her grandmother liked to be alone and was quite used to it by this time, Nona did not reproach herself long.

Emily Griscom's wedding was soon to take place and Sylvia insisted that she must have a new gown for that event and for Mrs. Ridgely's wedding which would occur immediately after. To be sure the latter was to be the quietest sort

of affair, but Sylvia was bound to outshine everybody and enjoyed being conspicuous even though it brought her to the point of being criticised for her questionable taste. In vain Nona tried to persuade her that over-dressing was inelegant, that it was fairly vulgar. She carried her grievance to Graham who told her Nona was only jealous, and that settled the matter for Sylvia. Therefore Nona, very ill at ease, was obliged to see her sister go forth adorned more showily than anybody else and the target for many ill-humored remarks. "Oh dear," sighed the girl when Sylvia's gown came home and she displayed herself in it to Graham's admiring eyes, "if she could only see how unsuitable it is and how much more ladylike and dignified she would look in something quieter." But now that Graham was ready to encourage his wife in her display, there was no improvement to be expected and Nona retired from the contest feeling herself worsted and yet pained to know that, by those she most wished to impress, Sylvia would be called vulgarly over-dressed. More than once she tried to tell Sylvia of some remark which

had been dropped regarding her, but Sylvia would only laugh and say it was all due to jealousy and Nona immediately felt herself disarmed. That she really and truly wished to shield her sister never entered Sylvia's head, who argued that there could not be enough of a good thing, and if a thing were pretty, more of it would increase its beauty.

To offset this effect Nona herself went to the wedding very simply attired and certainly was the gainer by the contrast, so thought more than one besides Randolph Harwood who saw her in her quiet gray silk made over since the night of the Old Folks' Concert. He was best man at the wedding and was a great steadier for Bennett's sorely tried nerves. Poor Bennett was shy and awkward and but for Randolph would have forgotten everything he had to do. But all went off well and there was never a more radiant bride nor more ecstatic groom when the ceremony was over and all had gathered at the reception. Emily was pale but her eyes shone like stars. Bennett was flushed and excited but happiness beamed in every feature.

Nona was standing in a corner watching the gay company when Randolph Harwood sought her out. "Well, Miss Mouse," he said, "why did you slip away when I tried to reach you just now?"

"Were you trying to reach me? I didn't know it. I came over here to get out of the crowd and to look at the people. It was a pretty wedding, wasn't it?"

"So far as I could judge it was, but in my office as best man I didn't have so good an opportunity to see it as you did. I like you in that little gray gown," he said after a moment, "but you should carry May-flowers, Priscilla."

"Oh, I do believe it was you who sent them."

"I acknowledge it."

"Then please receive my belated thanks. I am glad you like my little mousey gown; it is the same that I wore at the concert; I made it over."

He smiled at her ingenuousness. "You made it over?"

"Yes. Did you think I was too useless a creature to do such things?"

"No, I knew you were a famous needlewoman, for I have heard that from your grandmother. How is the dear woman?"

Nona's face grew grave. "I have not seen her for several days. She was not pleased at my leaving her, but I felt that my first duty was to Sylvia in her new experiences as housekeeper, and we have been so very busy since I came back to town that I have not had any time to go out to the farm. Besides," she smiled, "I want her to get over her anger before I see her again."

"She can be very tempestuous, I fancy. So you are living in town again. May I come to call on you at your sister's?"

"Yes, if you like. We shall be very glad to see you."

"Really glad, Nona?" He smiled and there was no gloom in his eye. Truly he was keeping his word and had cast suspicion behind him. Several times of late he had dropped the formal Miss Ridgely and had called her Nona as most of her friends did. It seemed to be done unconsciously on his part, but it pleased Nona, nevertheless.

She returned his smile. "Really glad," she answered, "especially if you bring some of your songs with you."

"I shall be delighted. I suppose I may not see you home."

Nona hesitated. "I came with Sylvia in the carriage."

"And she will expect you to return with her? Your sister is magnificent to-night."

A shadow passed over Nona's expressive face and Mr. Harwood read her disapproval of Sylvia's costume. He glanced again at her quiet dress. How well it suited her. Some day when her hair, too, was gray he would like to see her always in those neutral tints, gray hair, gray eyes, gray gown. But if he were not there to see her, if some one else — "Do you hear from Julian North?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes, I have had several letters from him." She smiled in remembrance of them. Randolph Harwood did not read the smile aright; he thought it was because of blissful memories.

"You enjoyed your visit to your cousin?"

"Yes, I think I never had a better time; Mar-

garet wants me to spend a month with her in New York after Christmas."

"Shall you go?"

"I cannot tell yet. I haven't made any promises. Next week we go up to the city. Mamma and Mr. Martin are to be married then, but we shall stay only a few days. It will be a very quiet wedding, but we think we ought to be there."

At this moment Sylvia came toward them. "I think we must go, Nona. Where have you kept yourself all this time? I have been looking everywhere for you."

"I have been over here having a nice quiet time looking on. Are you ready? Then good-night, Mr. Harwood."

He was waiting for her at the foot of the stairs when she came down, and saw her to the carriage. Sylvia laughed softly as they drove away. "I believe you have made an impression, Nona, even if you did insist upon wearing that dingy old silk."

"I don't think it looks dingy at all, Sylvia. It is so shiny, and is really very handsome."

"Well, I saw several persons looking at it as if they wondered at your wearing it," said Sylvia serenely, unconscious that anyone could admire Nona when she was around. Nona felt put down, but she remembered that Randolph Harwood liked the gown and she did not grieve.

If after all he should believe in her, should defy facts and proofs and should so understand her that he would realize that she was incapable of that deceit, how happy she would be, for, even as it was, she was happier to-night than she had been since those days last summer.

The next week came the trip to the city which, after the marriage of Mrs. Ridgely had been attended, Nona and Sylvia turned into a shopping expedition, and Sylvia enjoyed it hugely. There was nothing she liked so well as to spend money and Graham had supplied her liberally, even beyond what he could afford, and Sylvia was ready to spend it all and more, borrowing at the last from Nona to pay for some little extras. There had been many useless expenditures, for Sylvia could not bear to deny herself anything that she saw another possess, and she had an expensive

winter outfit by the time she returned home. She was generous, too, in her way and had bestowed several little things upon Nona which Nona in the end had to pay for, as Sylvia would never think to return the borrowed money.

In spite of all this, Nona enjoyed her little trip and Sylvia, who as a married woman was anxious to be chaperon to her younger sister, put on many airs and gave her name impressively. She was in good spirits and there were no serious squabbles to mar the enjoyment. Sylvia, always sweet and gracious to strangers, was at her best and attracted much attention, so she returned home in high good humor.

Mammy True had followed her young mistress to Sylvia's new home, so the wheels of housekeeping ran smoothly and altogether Sylvia was having a happy time of it, for Graham was still her lover and was ready to do anything she demanded of him.

Randolph Harwood was a frequent visitor at the house as winter approached, and there were other callers almost every evening.

There were, too, divers social events in honor

of the two brides, so Nona found herself included in many gaieties and enjoyed most of them. It was not till after Christmas that she was able to consider seriously Margaret's invitation, and then it was that Sylvia expected one of her former schoolmates to visit her.

"I think I ought to go to Aunt Celia's as long as Ethel Patterson is coming," she ventured to say one day.

"Why, Nona Ridgely, as if I shouldn't want you then more than ever," Sylvia replied.

"But I said I would come some time this winter, and when Ethel is here seems the best time for me to go, for then I wouldn't have to leave you alone."

"Who will paint my score cards and see to all the decorations and things when I give anything for Ethel?" asked Sylvia in an aggrieved tone.

"Why, can't you?"

"You know I can't paint."

"If I knew right away what you needed I might do them before I go," said Nona.

"As if I could tell right away. I think you

are very mean to wish to go. I am sure you have a good time here."

"Yes, I do, but I'd have a chance of hearing concerts and of going to fine lectures and of — oh, doing lots of things I can't do here."

"I'm sure if it is a good enough place for me it ought to be for you."

"I don't mean it isn't good enough, for I love the dear old place, only I should like those other things once in a while."

"Oh well, if you wish to be selfish about it, go on. Of course I can't expect you to be satisfied with what I can give you."

"Oh Sylvia, don't talk that foolish way. Can't you understand?" said Nona impatiently.

"I can't understand anything but that you are discontented and that you long for things which I cannot furnish you. Do pray go, if you feel that way about it. I thought when I had a pretty new home and when we could be together all the time that you would be perfectly happy, but it seems I was mistaken."

Nona was both indignant and distressed at this view of the question. She did not care for

Ethel Patterson, whom she had met only once, and she knew very well that Sylvia would not need her companionship when she had Ethel; nevertheless she had a small feeling of self reproach.

"I think you would be very foolish to go now," said Sylvia after a while. "Of course I know it is merely because of his fondness for music that Mr. Harwood comes here so often, but if you go away he will come for another reason, I can tell you that."

"What do you mean, Sylvia?" Nona felt the hot flush mount to her face.

"Why he used to know Ethel and was desperately in love with her, so they say, and I know very well Ethel is not going to lose her chance of winning him back, so if you don't want to lose him you'd better stay."

This was quite enough for Nona. "You have said enough to make me decide to go," she said. "I'll go up and begin those score cards and things at once. When do you expect Miss Patterson?"

"On the tenth she said she could come."

"Very well, I will write Margaret that I will be there on that day." And she left the room. It wanted but a week of that date and she was obliged to work hard in order to accomplish all that she had promised, in the meantime refusing more than one invitation. She made a point of avoiding Mr. Harwood and did not see him till the evening before her departure. She spent a day with her grandmother, being received somewhat stiffly and having no fuss whatever made over her. The plainest sort of dinner was set before her and she was not pressed to stay, so she took her leave feeling rather crushed. Why was everyone so bent upon opposing her? "I feel all torn to pieces," she told herself, "with one pulling this way and another that. I am sure I don't expect anyone to give up everything for me. I don't ask Sylvia to make sacrifices on my account, nor grandma either, but everyone seems to think that all I am made for is to do as some one else wishes me to; they never seem to think I have any right to plans of my own. I am sure I do all I can for them both and I love them and they know it."

She finished her score cards, a neat pile of them, and painted some pretty little dinner and luncheon cards, which she gave to Sylvia, who accepted them as a matter of course, and laid them aside with rather a hurt expression as might become an offended deity whose votive offerings had not come up to her expectations. Graham, too, took the cue from Sylvia and remarked in tones of disapproval that he supposed he would have to order the expressman for Nona's trunk.

"You needn't trouble yourself," said Nona with spirit; "I can do it myself."

"It is no trouble," said Graham; "if you have really made up your mind to go. Of course you will wait till Miss Patterson comes."

"I take the nine o'clock train," said Nona, coolly, "and Miss Patterson doesn't arrive till four."

"Oh." Graham's tone was still more condemnatory.

"I suppose," thought Nona, "that it would have been more polite if I had stayed to see her, and had waited till to-morrow to go, but I don't like her, and I am going anyhow; I'd like to see anyone consider me in such a case."

Altogether it was very unpleasant and even Mr. Harwood's call did not serve to dissipate Nona's feeling of dissatisfaction. She was chillingly polite to him, for she could not forget Ethel Patterson. Sylvia and Graham had gone out to a card party and Nona received Mr. Harwood alone. She scorned to mention the name of Sylvia's expected guest and did not bring up the subject. She would not sing; she was too tired. She was captious and disdainful, a mood in which Mr. Harwood had never seen her. But he attributed it all to her excuse that she was tired and took his leave early. "May I write to you?" he asked. "You are to be gone — how long?"

"A month; perhaps longer; I cannot tell. Sometimes I think I will never come back."

"Don't say that, please. Will you give me your address?"

Nona told him where her cousin lived and he carefully noted it down. "And will you write to me once in a while?" he asked.

"I don't fancy my letters will interest you," she made reply. "I shall have very little time and you will probably be very much occupied," she said sarcastically.

"I could never be too busy to read your letters nor to write to you," he said gently. He held her hand for a moment. "Good-night, little girl; I will be down to the train to see you off. I may do that, mayn't I?"

"I am sure I cannot forbid your doing as you choose. I do not care."

"Then if you don't care, I will come. And you'll not promise to write to me?"

"I'll not promise, for I may not feel like fulfilling it."

"Then good-night again. A month is a long time."

"It is not so very long till nine o'clock," returned Nona with a sudden giving up of her ill humor. "Good-night, Mr. Harwood; I am sorry I am so cross."

"You have a right to be if you are tired and things have gone awry."

"Things are always going awry it seems to me," she sighed. "But never mind, they never do when I am with Margaret."

"Then I do not grudge her your stay with her," he returned.

CHAPTER XII

GOOD TIMES

Maurice Foster was waiting for his cousin when the train pulled into the station at Jersey City. He hurried her on board the ferry-boat and then took time to look at her. "All's well with you, Nona?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, "all is very well. It has been quite gay at home and I have been going around everywhere. We have two brides in town and our friends are vying with each other in showing them attentions, so the number of luncheons and card parties and things I have been to would amaze you. I left Sylvia in the thick of it and quite indignant that I should be willing to leave so festive a place for this village of Gotham."

Maurice smiled. "It certainly is not altogether slow here, but you will not have just the same sort of time we had last summer."

"We had good times," said Nona reminiscently. "I don't suppose just such ever do come back a second time. How is Ada?" she asked.

Maurice looked conscious. "She was very well, I believe, when Margie last heard from her."

"And Jim Macleod?"

"We see him often. Julian runs on once in a while, too."

"If we could have Ada here we might have a reunion."

"Maybe we could manage that," returned Maurice, looking pleased. "I'll suggest it to Margie. By the way, she told me to say that she would have come down with me to meet you, but she had an engagement she could not very well break, and she knew you wouldn't mind."

"Of course I don't mind. Are we in? Oh yes, that bump means the boat has reached the pier. Do we take the cars here? My, what high buildings, and, oh dear, I'll get run over if you don't hold on to me hard."

Maurice laughed and called her a green coun-

try maid as he piloted her safely across the street between drays and wagons, and soon they were on the elevated train and on their way up town. "I always feel so cheerful when I get with any of you all," said Nona contentedly. "None of you ever rub me the wrong way."

"From which I infer that there are some that do?"

"Yes, to tell the truth, Maurice, when one's sister gets married it isn't quite the same thing. Sylvia and I used to get along very well, but I must say that Graham does try me. He is so pompous and so cocksure that he is always right that he puts me in a bad humor. One could stand it if he had ever proved himself a person of surpassing judgment, but he has not set the Thames on fire and is not of any great account, though you would suppose him a second Solomon to listen to the way he puts me down. There, I feel better. I've not had my say in a long time, for of course I cannot speak my mind to Sylvia, and grandma is already so prejudiced that I have to stand up for Graham before her. So you see, as you are the first member of my

family I have met for some time, you have received the overturning of my vials of discontent."

Maurice laughed. "I reckon I can stand it. Graham struck me as possessing his own good share of self-esteem, but I suppose if Sylvia is satisfied we should not complain."

"Oh no, I don't complain, as far as she is concerned, though I repeat that it is pleasant to be among people who aren't quite so self-important."

"Thanks for the compliment," laughed Maurice.

"Do you consider me self-righteous?" asked Nona wistfully. "Some persons say that I am. Of course no one is perfect, but lately I have discovered that I have more faults than ever I dreamed of."

"Nonsense," said Maurice, frowning. "Certainly you are human, Nona, but self-righteous, my goodness! you are never that." He made up his mind that Nona's new home was rather a thorny place for her and he determined that while she was in New York it should be a flowery way, if he could make it so.

Margie was on the lookout for them, and took her cousin off immediately to her own room. "I have such lots to say to you," she said. "Oh, and you have not been here since we removed to the Drive. Come, look out of my window. There, isn't that fine?"

Nona gave an exclamation of pleasure. The apartment on Riverside Drive faced the river, and now, at dusk, myriads of lights twinkled out from the city, vessels were passing, and along the opposite shore the Jersey cliffs arose. "Isn't it fine?" said Nona. "I am delighted, Margie. I had no idea that any spot in New York could be as pleasant as this; it has always appeared to me to consist of hotels and long rows of houses, so dry and uninteresting, but I like this."

"I knew you would," Margie told her. "I do hope we shall have good weather, for we have planned so many things to do. Let me see, to-night Jim is coming to dinner, and there is sure to be company after; to-morrow he and Maurice will meet us down town and we are going to one of those queer Italian restaurants you have al-

ways been curious about, and we will go to the theatre afterward. Then there is a morning concert on Friday, and a card party on Saturday, that is to be here,— and Saturday night we are going to the opera, and —" She paused.

"No more, please, Margie; that is quite enough to begin with," laughed Nona. "How lovely to have operas and concerts flung at you in that way. So Jim seems still to be your 'steady.'"

"Oh yes," Margie returned nonchalantly, "he is the steadiest, but there is a love of a little Hungarian I have met, who plays such weird music and is so fascinating, and then there is a young Italian who comes up and prepares the most delicious spaghetti. We always produce the chafing dish whenever he appears. You will like those two, I know; they are not a bit like the every-day people one meets at every turn. Oh yes, there is one invitation for next week that you will like to accept: Mrs. Van Arsdale is going to give a luncheon, and there is to be a fascinating Georgia girl there who does monologues in negro dialect, and there will be music by a real gypsy, some wild Zingara, in costume."

"I am bewildered," declared Nona, "but it sounds perfectly delightful, Margie. Will there be any time for shopping, do you think? I have waited to get some of my winter things till I should reach here."

"Oh yes, we can squeeze in a morning or afternoon anywhere. What do you wish especially to get?"

"A coat or a suit, or something like that. I've evening and home gowns enough, I think, and if I haven't I can easily get one up in a jiffy."

"Oh, you lucky thing, to be able to depend upon your own cleverness," sighed Margie. "Here, have some candy. I have a whole box of Huyler's that I haven't touched."

"You can't tempt me," replied Nona. "I was supplied very bountifully this morning."

"Aha! you were, were you? I'll wager it wasn't by your precious brother-in-law."

"No, it wasn't." She hesitated. "It was Mr. Harwood. He put me on the train and brought me some magazines and papers and a box of candy."

"Oh-h." Margaret said no more, but her

tone expressed volumes. Then they were interrupted by the appearance of the expressman with Nona's trunks. After dressing for dinner, which was shortly announced, Nona followed her cousin into a pretty dining-room, with its soft lights and dainty appointments, to be greeted by Mr. and Mrs. Foster and Jim Macleod who arrived, out of breath, at the last moment.

"I had to run to get here," he assured them. "The cars were blocked. Am I very late?"

"No, not so very," Margaret told him. "Your soup may be a trifle chilly, but that is all."

"Oh this Maryland cookery," Jim murmured as he caught sight of a plate of beaten biscuit, "there is nothing like it anywhere. I defy your Hungarian or Italian, or any other of your accomplished friends, to serve such a dinner as this."

"That's because you don't appreciate my foreign friends," returned Margaret.

"No, it is because you are to be congratulated upon having a Maryland woman for a mother," said Jim.

Maurice laughed. "It is plain to see that you are anxious to get on the good side of my mother, Jim. What is the special loaf or fish you are striving for?"

Jim looked a little confused and turned the subject, while Maurice and Nona exchanged meaning glances.

Dinner was scarcely over before Margie's two foreign friends made their appearance, the young Hungarian with his wild hair and fierce eyes looking, as Jim expressed it, "as if he hadn't been long down from his tree." The young Italian, Mr. Rigoni, was more like other people, Nona confided to Jim, who sniffed and said he looked like a banana vendor, and insisted upon always referring to him as the Dago. Nevertheless, Nona was charmed by the young man's courteous manner and found him most agreeable. The young Hungarian, Manuelo Strausz, was shy and awkward, except when he was talking of music or was playing on his guitar and singing his wild songs; then Nona thought him perfectly fascinating.

Margie evidently thought so, too, for she list-

ened to his every note with rapt attention, while Jim from his corner glowered wrathfully. But his hour was to come when Nona sang for them and Manuelo fixed his deep eyes on the little singer, running his fingers through his long dark hair, and being so absorbed in her performance that he had ears for no one else. When her song was finished he rushed impetuously toward her and in his broken English expressed his pleasure so extravagantly that Nona was embarrassed and was glad when some one proposed that Mr. Rigoni should prepare the dish of spaghetti he had been talking about, and all trooped to the dining-room to put the chafing dish into operation.

"He must have an apron," declared Margie. Rushing from the room she soon returned with a housemaid's apron which she tied around the waist of the "chef," as she called him.

"I must have a cap-a," he said, joining in the laugh at his appearance, and Nona soon had one ready for him which, perched upon his shining black head, made him look quite in character with his occupation.

"I MUST HAVE A CAP-A"

They were in the midst of their fun and hilarity when the names of Miss Kitty and Mr. Steuart Armistead were announced. Nona jumped to her feet. "Kitty Armistead! Oh Margie, you didn't tell me she was in town. I've not seen her since we left school. And Steuart, I remember him very well. He used to come every Saturday to see Kitty. Do you remember what larks we all had?" And they both laughed.

"Bring them right in here," said Mrs. Foster, and Margaret soon had followed her suggestion.

Kitty darted forward to clasp Nona. "Oh, you dear thing," she cried, "I didn't know you were coming."

"And I didn't know you were," laughed Nona.

"And here is Steuart," said Kitty. "I hope you haven't forgotten him."

"How could I?" said Nona giving Mr. Armistead her hand. And they laughed.

"There is evidently some joke here," said Maurice. "Can't you enlighten us?"

"Maybe, after a while," repied Nona. "When we get to reminiscing you may hear several jokes. Come over here, Kitty, and sit

by me; I have such a lot of questions to ask." And in a few minutes peals of laughter were coming from the corner where the two girls had established themselves.

"I'm so glad we happened upon a chafing-dish party," said Steuart. "Do you remember, Miss Nona, when you girls stole our club supper?"

Nona nodded. "But that was to pay you back for hiring all the vehicles in the place the day we wished to have our May party. You see," she said addressing the others, "our school was in a little town, and there was a boys' school there, too, so we were always playing tricks on each other to the despair of our teachers. I must say that sometimes they were rather mean tricks."

"But you never joined those," said Margaret, eager to defend Nona. "The worst thing I ever did was to set our bedroom curtains on fire so as to bring out the fire company. We were all pining for excitement and had to do something to break the monotony. They were my curtains and I didn't care, though mamma did. It was a very dangerous thing to do, as I look back

at it, for it might have been the means of causing a dreadful fire."

"I don't think that was any worse than what Mittie Ellis did," said Kitty, "for you put the fire right out after you had given the alarm."

"What did Mittie Ellis do?" asked Maurice.

"One day when we were out walking we had to cross a little bridge that went over the canal, and Mittie fell in on purpose. She was a splendid swimmer, but the teacher didn't know that, and she was nearly distracted when Mittie didn't come up where she went down. She thought she certainly must be drowned, but Mittie swam under water a little way and came to the surface further down. Half the boys from the Academy were rushing down to rescue her, and poor Miss Davis was wild. Mittie just did it because Miss Davis had told us that we were not to speak to the Academy boys when we were out walking, and when we reached home after Mittie had been dragged ashore by half a dozen boys, she very meekly asked Miss Davis if she was going to give her demerits for thanking the boys for their help."

"I can't imagine Nona's playing any such pranks," said Mrs. Foster, "and I didn't know you did, Margie."

"We didn't do anything very bad," Margie replied. "The curtain trick was my very worst, and I 'fessed that long ago. Nona's worst was to join in the serenade we gave Miss Gillespie when we heard she was engaged to be married. Such a din as we made — combs, jewsharps, mouth-organs, and I don't know what."

"Still we haven't heard of the prank in which Steuart took part," said Maurice.

"You will have to get him to tell that," said Nona.

"Out with it, Steuart," urged Maurice.

The young man looked a little reluctant, but they all clamored for his account of the affair and he began. "I was climbing up to Kit's window one night to take her a box of candy, when I slipped on the roof and fell into the slop barrel."

"And the worst of it was," Kitty interrupted, "the candy went too." She spoke in such a regretful tone that they all shouted; and then the

spaghetti was ready and they all took their places around the table.

All this time Manuelo Strausz had been sitting by himself, softly twanging on his guitar, but he now came forward and elbowed his way to Nona's side, where he seated himself. There was great fun over the spaghetti. Mr. Rigoni deftly wound it around his fork and had no trouble at all in managing it; the Hungarian ate it by lifting a long piece high in the air, and opening his mouth to receive it, "for all the world like a young robin when he takes a worm," whispered Kitty to Nona. The others strove to imitate the Italian, but no one succeeded very well, and finally each used such device as was most convenient, but all pronounced it delicious. Then there was more music, a wild dance played by the Hungarian in syncopated time, so suggestive of a cake walk that Steuart, remembering Nona's success in this direction, insisted upon leading her out, and the two ended the evening's performance by "bringing down the house," as Maurice expressed it, and were presented with a mock cake when,

breathless from her exertions, Nona sank into a chair.

After she was in bed she thought it all over. Not since her summer visit to Margie had she had such a merry time. She wondered what Randolph Harwood would say to such nonsense, yet it was not of him that she dreamed, but of the wild-haired Hungarian with the intense eyes.

CHAPTER XIII

MANY DIVERSIONS

For the next week there was a round of pleasures for Nona, but among them all one day stood out as being the most satisfactory, all things told. Margaret came into Nona's room that morning before the latter was up, and perched upon the bed beside her, drawing her warm red bathrobe closely about her and letting only the tips of her bedroom slippers appear. "Well, my lady," she said, "what do you wish to do with yourself to-day? I must tell you that I shall have to efface myself for a certain time this afternoon, for this is my day for work in our S. E. Club."

"And what does S. E. stand for?" asked Nona, poking her head up above her down coverlet.

"We don't tell everybody, but you shall know. It stands for self-effacement. A certain number

of us giddy young things felt that unless we had a certain time for doing our duty to our neighbor we were in danger of being swallowed up in the whirl which blows one along here in New York, so we resolved that once a week we would give an afternoon or morning to doing something not merely for our own pleasure or profit, but for some one else, some one who really needed our help. I suppose," she added laughing, "that I might make the excuse of having devoted myself to my country cousin who needed me."

"You mean creature!" cried Nona, roused from her snuggled down position and sitting up in bed. "If you say such things of me I will throw this pillow at you. Go on; tell me more about your club; it interests me."

"Then, since you refuse to help me out by posing as my duty, to-day you will have to stay at home or join in the proceedings. You see we haven't any cast-iron rules; we take any day we choose in the week and give up either morning, afternoon or evening. A good many of the girls take Sunday, but I think it is better to take some

other day if you can, for then you make more of a sacrifice. We don't make it a penance, you understand, but we simply do something that isn't for our own self-gratification. Now, this afternoon I thought I would go and help Florence Owens with the babies. I shall really enjoy it and it will give the dear woman a quiet hour for her work."

"Who is Florence Owens?"

"She is the dearest thing, and so bright. She married a worthless wretch of a man who didn't support her, but who died a year ago and left her with two little children to take care of. She manages to get along somehow, writes all sorts of things, anything that she can find a sale for; but with those two little children it is, of course, very hard for her to find time to go out or to have a really uninterrupted hour, except when Woofy, as he calls himself, is asleep. He is a darling and really as good as gold, but it is hard for his mother to resist him when he gets tired of playing and comes to her for comfort. So I am going over there and will try to amuse Woofy and Posy while Florence gets a chance to write some particularly elusive article."

"Would she mind — Oh, Margie, might I go with you?"

"Why, of course, if you'd like to. Flo would love to see you, and you'll like her, she is so bright and has such courage. She has two or three rooms, way up in Harlem, because she thinks it is better for the children there, but it means long journeys for her when she goes down town, and if she has no one to leave the children with she must take them with her. We'll have an early lunch and start right after. This morning we go to Miss Abbott's Shakespeare class, you know. Goodness! we'd better hurry and get dressed instead of sitting here." And Margaret made a flying leap from the bed, her red robe at once disappearing into the confines of her own room.

The Shakespeare class was over by twelve o'clock and not long after the girls were on their way to Harlem. It was a cold, crisp day, and they hurried along, holding their muffs to their faces to escape the keen air from the river.

"I think your S. E. Club is a great thing," Nona remarked; "I believe I will try to get up one at home."

"We girls think we must give ourselves over to pleasure when we leave school," Margaret returned; "we are so glad of the freedom that we can't think of anything but enjoying ourselves, and everybody says: 'Oh, let them have all the fun they can; they'll never be young but once,' and so we think it is right and proper to be butterflies."

"How did you think of this plan?" Nona asked.

"Oh, bless you, honey, I didn't think of it. Don't give me credit for such solidity of character. It was George Ewing who got it up; she is the most thoughtful and the most resourceful one among us and is president of the club."

"I thought you said George. Is he a she?"

"Yes, for her name is Georgia, but we never call her anything but George. She is a dear; you must know her. We meet once a month at her home and always come away feeling better for it. Don't imagine she is solemn and slow, for she isn't; she is perfectly delightful, full of fun, and the most interesting talker I know. She has no end of money and pretty clothes and has

nothing in the world to hamper her, for her grandfather and she have an apartment and they take their meals in the café attached to it, so George hasn't an earthly responsibility except what she chooses to take. She has a maid who looks after her like an old dragon, only she happens to be a very nice English woman and not a dragon at all. I think George has a great deal of character, for lots of girls, in her place, would be utterly frivolous. Here we are. Take it slowly for there is no elevator and we have four flights to climb."

They arrived breathless before Mrs. Owen's door, and in answer to Margaret's knock the door was opened by a pretty young woman whose face lighted up at sight of Margaret. "Meg, you dear child! You always appear like a good fairy whenever I want you most. I was wondering how I could get in the half dozen things that I so want to do this afternoon, and here you are to help me out."

"I am so glad," replied Margaret, following her friend into the room. "This is my cousin, Nona Ridgely, of whom you have heard me speak

so often. I know you are glad to see her, Flo."

"Of course I am; delighted. Come right in, girls; don't mind the clutter of the children's toys, will you?"

"Where are the dear lambs?" Margaret asked. "Oh, Woofy, here's Meg."

"Here's Woofy," responded a little voice from under the table. And Margaret, lifting up one end of the table cover, peeped under.

"Oo-oo!" said Woofy in a terrible voice. "I is a big bear. I'm going to eat oo, Meg."

"Come try it," said Margaret, and Woofy on all fours crawled out and climbed up into Margaret's lap, gnashing his teeth and growling fiercely. Margaret caught him to her, covering his face with kisses and soon the two were having a great romp.

"You won't mind if I go right off and leave you, will you, Miss Ridgely?" said Mrs. Owens. "There are half a dozen places I ought to go, and the afternoons are so short. I don't know what I should do but for Margaret."

Nona was making friends with little Rosalie

who was rather shy, but who saw in Nona a friend when that young lady picked up a battered doll and asked its name. "She's named Nona," said Rosalie bashfully.

"Why, that is my name," said Nona in surprise.

"Cousin Meg gave her to me," said Rosalie, "and she told me her name was Nona." The child looked much pleased and gazed from her doll to its namesake. "I fink you are most as pretty as she is," she remarked gravely. Nona laughed, for the battered doll was by no means a lovely object.

"Oh, that is Posy's dearest doll," said Mrs. Owens; "she had two others at Christmas, but they have never taken the place of her beloved Nona. So you see, Miss Ridgely, your name is a household word." She turned to Margaret. "I am so eager to see Mr. Appleby of *The Occident*. He sent me word that he might give me a chance on the Woman's page if I could stop in this week to see him."

"Oh, Mr. Thomas Appleby? We have known him all our lives; he is a great friend of father's."

"I do hope I can get that work," said Mrs. Owens. "I shall make a great effort to go there this afternoon." She picked up a bundle. "I must go to the office first with these. Would you mind if I stayed till quite dark, Meg? Can you stay so late?"

"Oh yes. Nona and I will not mind going home after dark since there are two of us. I tell you what I wish you would let me do. I could go to Mr. Appleby's as well as not. I believe, Flo, that it would be better than if you were to go, for you know that you are not your own best trumpeter."

Mrs. Owens looked quickly around at Nona.

"Oh, I can stay with the children," Nona assured her. "I know I can amuse them, Mrs. Owens, and I'd love to. You and Margie go along and let me stay and keep house. You won't mind leaving the children with me, will you? Let me see, I can tell them a story about a sheep and a fairy and a bear." She glanced down at Rosalie who was clasping her fingers. Woofy came closer. "A big bear?" he asked.

"Yes, very big and black. Then, let me see;

it seems to me that the dolls might like a party. Didn't we have some animal crackers and two oranges and some mint sticks, Margie? I think I remember seeing something of the kind."

"How fine!" cried Mrs. Owens. "What a lovely time you will have, children. Kiss mamma, darlings, for she must go. You dear girls, you don't know what a blessing you are."

Nona watched the two disappear and then turned her attention to the children who really entertained her as much as she did them, for they were imaginative little souls and Nona's make-believes were very real to them. They were obedient and gentle, for their mother had been obliged very often to impose quiet upon them, and it was no task at all to amuse them. To be sure they had one or two little squabbles when Woofy insisted upon eating the doll's share of the candy, but there was no serious outbreak, and on the whole the afternoon passed pleasantly.

The rooms showed many makeshifts but were cosy and very pretty. As it grew dark Nona gathered the two little ones to her and told them stories till presently Margaret appeared

jubilant over the success of her visit down town. It had been a long, cold trip but she did not mind that since her efforts had not failed. It was quite dark when Mrs. Owens came in, tired but cheerful. Margaret ran to meet her. "Good news, Flo! Mr. Appleby was urbanity itself, and it is all right. You are to have the page and it will pay very well, so you will be sure of a certain sum every week. I am so glad I went. I never was in a newspaper office before and I learned many very interesting things."

"I don't believe I should have sent you by yourself," said Mrs. Owens hesitatingly.

"Nonsense! What difference did it make? I went on business and I am no better than you, Flo Owens."

"Oh, my dear, I am so thankful for your news. I can't tell you what it means to me. I was really discouraged when the new year came and the outlook seemed so very dark. I felt almost like giving up once or twice and sending the children — "

"Sh! Sh!" cried Margaret. "Don't say such things. It is all right now and Mr. Ap-

pleby is a dear; I know you will like him. You are to go down Monday to get your instructions, and on Saturday Mr. Appleby will be here to see you."

"Oh, but Meg," said Mrs. Owens deprecatingly; "he is such a busy man."

"And you are such a busy woman. Don't you bother about him; he will live through the extra pressure on his time, don't you fear."

She did not tell how wistfully she had pleaded her friend's cause and how her championship had everything to do with Mr. Appleby's decision. "What luck did you have?" she asked.

"Not much," returned Mrs. Owens. "But never mind, I saw some funny things and I got some new ideas, so my trip was not a failure, and you have done me more than one good turn. Were my babies much bother, Miss Ridgely?"

"Bother? They were a delight. We have had a wonderful time. There have been fairies and elves and bears and I can't tell you what, rioting all over this room. And feasts! you never knew such a banquet as we have had. I

have enjoyed myself so much, Mrs. Owens, and I am coming again, if you will let me. May I come on Monday while you go down to see Mr. Appleby? I can as well as not."

"You dear child, how good you are."

"Please let her come," whispered Rosalie.

Mrs. Owens laughed. "Let her, my baby? I am only too pleased that she will."

"Now I must kiss my namesake good-bye and go," said Nona gravely, pressing her lips to the face of the battered doll.

Rosalie threw her arms around her, enraptured. "I love you," she said. "I am glad you are named after my doll."

Margaret laughed. "I don't wonder Posy puts it that way for the doll looks as if it might have come out of the ark."

They took their leave feeling so warm of heart that the cold night mattered little. "We must hurry," said Margaret, "for to-night we are going to the Quadrangle Club. They are going to give 'In a Persian Garden.' I didn't know till I was down town that we could get the tickets. I telephoned from Mr. Appleby's office to Maurice and he said he had them."

"I am so glad," said Nona. "Of all things I have wanted to hear that. Is Jim going?"

"No, I don't think so. I don't know just how Maurice has arranged it. We'll find out when he gets home; but one thing I know: it will be sung delightfully."

"How I shall enjoy it," exclaimed Nona ecstatically. As if to add to her pleasure in the occasion, she found in her room, on her return to her aunt's, a letter from Randolph Harwood. "When are you coming home?" he asked. "We all miss you, and each morning I say to myself:

'The Bird of Time has but a little way
To fly — and lo, the Bird is on the wing,'

but yet it seems that he flies heavily, for I do not hear from you."

Nona held the letter a long time in her hand. Then she sighed and slipped it back into its envelope, yet it made her happier. When she had dressed herself in her most becoming gown she left her room and was attracted by the sound of a familiar voice in the parlor beyond. Following the sound she entered the room to find sit-

ting there with Margaret, who but Julian North. He rushed forward to greet her, seizing both her hands and so evidently glad to see her that whatever may have become of his sentimentalism of the previous summer it was plain enough that his friendship remained. "Isn't this the jolliest chance?" he said. "I ran in on Maurice this morning and he told me that you were in town and that he had tickets for us all to-night, and so, Miss Nona, we're to hear the 'Persian Garden' together. It is great and I known you'll like it. I've been trying to cut away ever since I heard you were coming but I couldn't get off till now, and I'll be on hand till Monday. Consider me your slave till then."

Nona laughed. It sounded very familiar, all this talk. "Poor slave," she said. "How many chains do you already wear? Tell me about your latest flame, and how is Ada and when were you last in Fairington?"

"Maurice can tell you about Ada better than I can," said Julian nonchalantly, "for he writes oftener. I was home for the Christmas holidays, you know, and my latest love, oh sweet soul, is yourself."

"Silly, silly, silly," chanted Nona. "Are you going to keep this up all the evening and spoil my pleasure in the music? For you surely will."

"Then I won't, but when they sing 'O, Moon of My Delight,' won't you let me hold your hand?"

Margaret threw a sofa pillow at him. "Stop your foolishness, Julian North, or I'll tell some tales on you that you will not like. Remember, I remained in Fairington last summer after Nona left."

Julian put up his hands to ward off the threat. "Please, please, good lady, don't tell anything that will make Miss Nona think any the less of me. I've been counting on this visit for weeks and don't be so heartless as to spoil it for me."

"Then don't spoil her pleasure in the 'Persian Garden.'"

"I won't," he promised. "Honest Injun, I'll not. I'll be as good as pie."

He kept his word except that he furtively sought Nona's hand when the tenor began his solo "O, Moon of My Delight," but Nona gave

him a severe look and he settled back in his seat and allowed her the pleasure of giving her whole attention to the music. Under the bodice of her gown lay the letter she had received from Randolph Harwood that afternoon and the music aroused in her a great longing to see him. "The Bird of Time is on the wing," she repeated to herself, "and soon I will be going back." Yet, though the poetry of old Omar appealed to her, and the music touched her inmost heart, she rebelled against the pagan philosophy and in her room that night her thoughts turned to what Margaret had said of George Ewing. "I'd like to meet her," she thought. "When am I going to see Miss Ewing?" she called to Margaret in the adjoining room.

"Oh, I can have her here to lunch on Monday."

"No, not Monday; I promised Mrs. Owen, you know."

"Tuesday then. I'll write a note to-morrow and I'll not ask anyone else, for we want her all to ourselves. What was Julian saying as he went out?"

"Something about the opera to-morrow night."

"Shall you care for a matinee then?"

"I think we'd better give that up. We must not burn our candles at both ends, as grandma says."

"The boys want us to lunch with them, you know."

"Yes, and Julian wants to show me his favorite picture at the Metropolitan Museum."

"Oh, well then, that's enough for one day. I suppose Julian will haunt the place. I really believe he likes you better than any other girl, Nona, for all his nonsense."

"Oh, no, no, I don't think so." But Margaret kept her own private opinion of the matter.

CHAPTER XIV

SOBER FACTS

"And how did you like Omar Khayyam's philosophy when you heard it sung?" asked Mr. Foster the next morning.

"I didn't like the philosophy any better," Nona answered, "but I liked the music immensely. Of course all of the Rubaiyat isn't included in the 'Persian Garden' and the parts that hurt one the most are those which are left out."

Mr. Foster smiled. "Then you don't believe in the doctrine which bids us eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die."

Nona looked serious. "It seems as if I had ever since I have been here."

"Oh, my dear," expostulated Mrs. Foster, "your uncle didn't mean to suggest such a thing."

"I know he didn't," returned Nona, coloring up, "but I was just reminded of it myself. I do

enjoy having a good time, but — I don't like to think that it is all I am meant for. I have heard so many new and strange things since I came to New York. At Miss Abbot's one of the girls was raving over one of those Hindoo teachers, Swamis, I believe they call them, and then there are others who believe as Omar says:

'This Life flies:

One thing is certain and the rest is Lies,'

and that is all they do believe, so they live for pleasure, for the excitement of the moment and think of nothing else. It seems strange to me that any one could want anything better than the Christian religion."

"In its purity," said Mr. Foster gravely. "Dear child, I hope you will always believe exactly as you do to-day."

Julian was on hand early and for the next two days quite absorbed Nona. He liked and respected her above all the girls that he knew and yet of all of them she was the only one who did not seem pleased with his sentimental speeches. "You are so up and down honest," he said to her, "that you regularly floor a fellow when you

look at him so seriously. You won't pretend anything."

"Except when I am playing with children. If you want to play at fairy-tales, that is another thing, but if you are you and I am I there is no sense in acting as if each one was some one else."

"You certainly are yourself and no other, and, confound it, I can't help liking you better for it. I do, Miss Nona, and that is a fact. You take hold of a fellow in a different way from that of most girls. When you say nice things you mean them, and one knows just where to find you."

Nona smiled. "Mamma says I will never make a success in society because I won't flatter, but I can't bear anyone to flatter me; it sounds so insincere, and I always feel as if I were considered a silly little brainless creature when I am offered such sugar-plums, as if I were not sensible enough to care for anything else. You can always tell when one is trying to flatter you and those who say such things generally have an axe to grind. I believe in saying nice things when they are true and when they don't add to a per-

son's vanity. Some persons need encouragement and get dreadfully low in their minds unless they have a few compliments once in a while to give them assurance, but you've got to be careful to choose wisely not only your compliments but those to whom you give them. I think often that the things about which a person is most modest and the least self-assured are the very ones he can do the best, while the things about which he is always wanting to be flattered are the ones he can't do well."

"I believe that is so," returned Julian. "How you have reasoned it all out."

"And have given you a real lecture on the subject."

"I don't mind that kind of lectures. Are you coming up to Fairington this summer? I hope so."

"I can't tell what a summer will bring forth," returned Nona. And then with a twinkle in her eye: "Isn't Ada going to have any of her girl friends with her?"

Julian had the grace to look confused. "Now, Miss Nona," he replied, "that is too bad. I

don't care whether she has or not. I'd like to have every summer as it was the month you spent in our little town."

"We did have a good time," returned Nona, "and I am having a good time here."

"So am I," answered Julian, helping himself to a toothsome piece of chocolate from a box on the table at his elbow. Julian's offerings in the shape of boxes of candy were much appreciated by the girls, although Margaret teasingly said: "Julian always brings candy because he can help to eat it."

"Now Miss Margaret," he expostulated, "I'll bring flowers next time."

"Oh no, don't," hastily said Margaret, and they all laughed at the protest in her tones.

The two were sitting by one of the windows overlooking the river this Sunday afternoon, when Margaret joined them. Julian bewailed the fate which must take him away the next morning.

"And this is my last Sunday, too," said Nona regretfully.

"Oh no," exclaimed Margaret. "Why Nona, what makes you say that?"

"Because it is. I had a letter from Sylvia last night and she says that Ethel Patterson is going the first of the week and that I must come right home."

"Oh bother!" cried Margaret. "I'd like to see me let Sylvia order me around in that way. Don't you go."

"But Sylvia will need me."

"Nonsense! She has plenty of friends and I don't see why she should be any more lonely than anyone else. I think she is horrid to want to break up your visit."

However, Nona did not give up her intention, though Margaret tried hard to dissuade her from it. "There are still so many things to do," she said regretfully; "we haven't begun to get through."

"Never mind," said Julian," she is coming up to Fairington next summer for the entire summer and then we will have some good old times, just as we did last year."

Nona smiled. "As Uncle Remus says: 'Tar Baby ain't a-sayin' nuffin'.'"

Margaret gave her a sly look. "You know

what I didn't promise you when you went away last summer, Nona. I think I might safely have done it."

Nona made a dab at her with the fan she was holding. "Hush, you bad girl, you don't know what may happen before next summer; it is too early to count on anything or anybody."

"What riddles are you two talking?" asked Julian curiously.

"We don't tell. Wait till next summer," Margaret told him.

The week flew by all too rapidly. Nona confessed that she did miss Julian, and Margaret vehemently declared that this time it was "the real thing" with Julian, though Nona scoffed at the idea.

Monday saw her again in charge of the Owens babies, and the next day brought George Ewing. She was not a really beautiful girl, but there was a charm in her voice and manner that it was impossible to withstand and Nona promptly fell in love with her.

Indeed, the two seemed mutually attracted, and it was a genuine regret to Nona that she

must so soon leave the city when the promise of this new friendship was so pleasant. George asked the girls to lunch with her, and began to plan many pleasures for them, but they were nipped in the bud by Nona's departure. She did linger till the last moment and then went off unwillingly, Margaret's last words to her being: "All next summer, remember."

Sylvia was not at the station to meet her sister, for she had some festivity on hand, and Nona arrived at the house to find no one at home but Mammy True. "I sholy is glad to see yo face agin," she said as she opened the door. "I wisht yuh'd hu'y up an' git ma'ied, Miss Nona, so I kin come an' live with yuh. I ain' had no sattyfaction o' mahse'f sence I lef' de ole house."

"Oh, but I couldn't be so mean as to take you from Miss Sylvia, even if I were married, Mammy," returned Nona.

"Dey wouldn't be no tekin'; dey would jes be a gwine, an' I'd be de one dat done de gwine. Is yuh had yo suppah?"

"Not yet, but there will be time enough when Mr. Waters comes."

"He ain' a-comin', nuther is she. Dey is gone to some sorter fessible an' ain' comin' home fo' night. Miss Sylvy say ef yuh is come to give yuh a good mess o' sumpin an' say she come back late."

"Very well; any time will do. How is Miss Sylvia?"

"She lookin' sorter peaked. She run too much, I say. She on de go all de time, paddin' hyar, an' paddin' dere; up late in de mornin' an' up late at night; jes gad, gad, gad, all de undu'in time. An' dat young miss, what been hyar, de same. My, she's de one to mek eyes at de beaux! I sees huh one night when dat Mr. Har-'ood hyar to dinnah, an' dey off in de cornder when I brings in de coffee to de lib'ry, an' she mekkin' eyes at him fo' all she wo'th, an' he lookin' foolish like settin' dere holdin' huh han-kercher."

A sudden chill seemed to strike Nona's heart. It was as she had feared, but why should it trouble her? "I'll go up to my room, Mammy," she said, "and when I am ready I will come down and you can give me a cup of tea; I shall not want anything else."

"Humph!" grunted Mammy, as Nona disappeared. "She look worrited. I reckons she think Miss Sylvy runnin' huhse'f to deaf. Law! she fair dote on Miss Sylvy lak she gol' an di'minds, po' chile!"

Nona went slowly up-stairs, stopping a moment at the door of Sylvia's room which was strewn with garments and from which a soft perfume of violets issued. Mechanically Nona went in and picked up a skirt from the floor, a dressing sacque from the bed, a pair of corsets from a chair and put them away. Then she went on to her own room. It was evident that it had been occupied by Miss Patterson and that she had not been long gone, or else the room had been allowed to remain just as she left it, for the bed, from which the bed-clothes had been taken, was unmade; the dressing-table was sprinkled with powder and cluttered with odds and ends of various kinds; a drawer of the stand stood open; empty bottles of some face lotion stood on the washstand, and the room was redolent with the odor of scented soap. Nona threw open the windows and after putting away her hat and wraps,

proceeded to set the place to rights. The housemaid was out and there was no hope of having the room swept that evening, but Nona applied herself vigorously to clearing away the clutter; then, after getting fresh linen, she made the bed, closed the windows and went down-stairs with her scrap-basket loaded with rubbish.

"Dere now, what I say?" exclaimed Mammy when she saw her. "I ask dat lazy Malviny is she fix dat room an' she say she so do. I 'low de baid ain' even maid."

"It wasn't. Do, Mammy, throw away this stuff; it makes me fairly ill. If it wasn't so late I'd go out to grandma's; I am so disgusted. I really hate to sleep in that room."

"I fly in an' sweep hit up right now," said Mammy waddling across the floor for the broom.

"No, never mind to-night; it's all dusted and I left the windows open for a good while. I suppose Malviny isn't doing any better. I wonder Sylvia keeps her."

"She gwine keep huh. Malviny know where huh bread an' butter lay. She say, 'Law, Miss Sylvy, yuh so pretty an' yo clothes so stylish an'

rich lookin' I clar I fergit to do dat': das what she say when Miss Sylvy scold, an' so she gwine keep huh till she so good-fer-nothin' she bleedged to let huh go. Come along, honey, I has yo suppah ready fo' yuh: nice hot chocolate an' toas' an' a lil bit o' oyscher stew an' sponge cake what I mek dis ve'y day an' dem yaller blue monges what yuh laks so much, de jelly kin' wid aigs in hit. Come get yo suppah, Mammy's baby." And Nona, encouraged by this interest in her welfare, sat down and ate more than she had believed possible, lingering over her meal daintily.

"I was hungry, Mammy," she said as the old woman appeared to clear away the dishes. "Everything tasted so good."

Mammy beamed. "Dey is a good fiah in de lib'ry, yuh go in dere an' read de picture papers, an' mek yo'se'f comfable. You trunk done come, an' I done swep' yo room a little, but hit col' up dere, fo' I lef de winders open. When hit git fresh an' sweet I'll shet em up an' tu'n all de heat up dere."

"Oh, Mammy, you are a dear," said Nona, giving her a hug. "It was good of you to do that lazy Malviny's work."

"I ain' do hit for' no Malviny, honey. I does hit fo' my baby. I'll git hit out o' Malviny yit, yuh see." And she went off chuckling.

For an hour Nona sat before the open grate fire, but she did not read much. She was thinking, thinking. She pictured the scene of which Mammy had told her — over there in the cosy corner it must have been — and she closed her eyes as if to shut out the vision. It had been nothing but pain and struggle from the very first, why so persistently allow herself to care for this man of all others? She would control the feeling; she would not allow it to take possession of her. She would think of Julian, who, after all, might make her happier, and her memory took her back to Margaret, and Maurice, and Jim, to the wild-haired Hungarian, to the gentle-voiced Italian, to Florence Owens, so bravely fighting the battle of life, and it is quite possible, if it had been earlier in the day, that, under the pressure of her loneliness she would have started back to New York then and there, that she might rid herself of uncomfortable associations.

She did not wait for Sylvia's return, but went

to bed early, and though she felt hurt at being left alone, she was spared any reproaches for not sitting up for her sister, when she appeared at the breakfast table the next morning.

Sylvia pounced upon her and embraced her rapturously. "Oh, you dear thing!" she cried. "I am so glad to see you. We had no idea that you would come before Monday, as long as it was so late in the week. I knew Mammy True would take care of you if you did happen to come, so I let Malviny go to a wedding. I am afraid your room was not in order, though."

"Mammy helped me get it ready," Nona told her, "and she had a nice supper for me, so I didn't suffer."

"We were invited to the Payne's to dinner and there were cards afterward, so we couldn't get away; Graham was so interested in his game."

Nona looked at her sister critically. There were shadows under her eyes and she looked thinner, but she was in good spirits.

"We've been having a lovely time," Sylvia went on. "Ethel is such fun, and she made quite a sensation, so we had loads of company,

and went everywhere you can think. She would have stayed till the last minute, for there were things coming up all the time, but she had promised to be bridesmaid for a cousin and simply had to go. Did you have a good time?" she asked, pouring out Nona's cup of coffee.

"I had a perfect time," Nona answered.

"Then I don't see why you didn't stay a little longer," said Sylvia nonchalantly.

Nona looked surprised. "But you said you wanted me to come right back."

"Well, so I did, but I could have invited Grace Martin to make me a visit; she is a niece of mamma's Mr. Martin, you know. By the way, mamma came to see me last week; she is looking well and wanted to know when you were coming to see her. I told her I couldn't spare you, and she said Grace was ready to make her visit to me at any time." Nona thought regretfully of the good times she had given up that she might return to her sister, and wished that Sylvia had been a little more exact upon the subject.

Sylvia was captious and capricious these days,

and Nona found it harder to get on with her. It did not hurt her in the smallest degree to be called intolerant and opinionated when she did not agree with Sylvia, and she did not resent the accusation. She knew perfectly well that no one else thought her so, and it sometimes really amused her to observe Sylvia's attitude of self-righteousness, for she could never be brought to believe herself in the wrong. Graham had so often told his wife that she was an angel that she was secure in her self-esteem. Her little pettish moods, which swirled her around like a leaf in a stream, would have won the contempt of a less loving soul than Nona, but Nona's affection was unassailable, and she viewed Sylvia's small jealousies as she would the scratchings and bitings of an irresponsible kitten. Once in a while she did venture to press home a charge, founded upon some former representation of Sylvia's, but that person would promptly retreat, resent, deny, or, if the matter was shown up in proof positive fashion, Sylvia would defy her sister and take refuge in tears. Nona found it rather a puzzle to dispose properly of her sympathies, for Sylvia

was as variable as the wind, and was a martyr in so many contradictory causes that her sister never knew whether hers was the hand that was supposed to have lighted the martyr's fire, or whether the inquisitorial thumb-screws had been applied by Graham or some other.

Never admitting that she could be wrong, Sylvia was ready to denounce Graham one day and declare that Nona was the only one who loved her, but at the faintest suggestion from Nona, of indifference on Graham's part, Sylvia would promptly turn on her and deny every former statement which she may have made, always providing that Graham in the meantime had won her over by flattery. Nona often found so many dreadful qualities imputed to herself, that she wondered how it was that no one else had discovered them.

"You have a very poor memory or a very convenient one," was the most that she ever said, and straightway Sylvia wept. When pressed too far Nona would take refuge with her grandmother for a few days and by that time would be driven back to Sylvia with a renewed affection because

of Mrs. Wilson's arraignment of her sister. "Poor Sylvia," Nona would sigh, "she never dreams that anyone except grandma criticizes her. I suppose it may be true, as grandma says, that what she imagines herself to be exists only in her own mind, and that what she really is makes itself too obvious to others."

Yet Sylvia could be so sweetly affectionate, so delightfully entertaining, that outside the bosom of her own family her defects were hardly known, and because of the sweetness and delightfulness, Nona's love for her never failed, and she continued to bear with her, to wait on her, to sew for her and help her in the many directions where Sylvia was helpless, that it was no wonder she was ready to keep her sister near her. She appreciated Nona, too, in a certain way, but because she felt in her heart of hearts that Nona gave far more than she received, Sylvia made the most of what she did bestow, and set so high a value upon her own acts of generosity that Nona was sometimes made very uncomfortable when Sylvia reminded her of her weight of obligation. She kept all these things to herself, however, and

did not alter her attitude of devotion toward her sister. Indeed, it is unlikely that she realized the extent of Sylvia's unpleasant qualities, since they were offset by so many agreeable ones, and since love is blind.

CHAPTER XV

AN EASTER PARTY

By the beginning of Lent Sylvia was quite worn out and drooped more and more as the spring drew near, so finally Graham decided that when Easter came he would take her to Atlantic City for a couple of weeks. "Then you can go to Baltimore and make mamma that promised visit," said Sylvia to Nona.

"I will see," Nona replied. "I am not sure that I shall care to go."

"I'd love to have you go with us," said Sylvia. "Won't you come, Nona? I can lend you the money for the trip."

Nona shook her head. "No, I'd better not. I don't need the change of air as you do." She remembered that Ethel Patterson would be there and she had no desire to meet the young lady, and, moreover, she had begun to see that Graham was jealous of her affection for her sister. His

was not a large nature, and he would fain occupy all the room in Sylvia's heart, and crowd out even her own sister. He was a little jealous, too, of Ethel Patterson, but she made an effort to amuse him and Sylvia did not see her often enough to give Graham much cause for discomfort. With Nona it was different and the girl was learning that her presence in Sylvia's home was not altogether to Graham's liking, yet because Sylvia wanted her she ignored the fact, uncomfortable as it made her feel. She had more than once determined to make her home with her grandmother and if there had been harmony between Mrs. Wilson and Sylvia she would have done so.

She had not mentioned Mr. Harwood to Sylvia, but on one or two occasions when Sylvia was in a bad humor, she had referred spitefully to Mr. Harwood's attentions to Miss Patterson, and had declared it would be a match; in consequence, Nona avoided Mr. Harwood whenever she could, and taking his cue from her, he seldom called; when he did, Sylvia was present, and most of the evening was given to music. Nona had told

her sister of Julian, and Sylvia had been interested, so that she made many allusions, in Mr. Harwood's presence, to Nona's admirer, and had taken delight in making him believe that it was a serious matter. She had determined that she did not care for Mr. Harwood as a brother-in-law, but that she would like him to marry Ethel Patterson. Nona should marry Julian and live in New York and then Sylvia could visit her there. Ethel should marry Randolph Harwood, and then Sylvia would have her friend close at hand; so she arranged it all and was well pleased with her plans.

"I will not, I will not let myself care for him," said Nona to herself one day in March, when, seeing Randolph across the street, she felt her heart beat and her cheeks flame. She was on her way to her grandmother's. It was cold enough to make good walking and Nona had escaped with a feeling of relief at the prospect of the walk. It had been a trying week, for Sylvia had been more than usually exacting and petulant, and Nona had sewed steadily to help her sister in her preparations for the visit to Atlantic City.

She turned up a side street to avoid speaking and then chided herself for doing so. "I wish I might never see him," she said to herself passionately. Then suddenly she remembered the evening she had parted from him in Fairington and she whispered: "He did care; he did. Oh, it is cruel, cruel of fate to treat me so." For a moment she felt as though she must retrace her steps; that she must go to him and declare her innocence. The joy of feeling that there would then be no barrier between them dazed her for a moment, and she stood still in indecision. Then Sylvia's face rose before her, beautiful, tenderly reproachful, with shadows under the eyes and a pathetic droop to the lovely mouth. Nona caught her breath and hurried on. "Never, never," she murmured. "I will die first. Oh, Sylvia, my dear thorny rose, you are so sweet that I would bear anything for you." But her emotion made her strangely tired and she, too, looked pale when she reached her grandmother's.

Mrs. Wilson was busy in the garden with Thad, directing some work. She nodded to

Nona. "I'll be in directly. Go into the sitting-room and take off your things; it is too damp out here unless you are prepared for it." She was not long in following her grandaughter. "Well," she said, "I am glad to see you. I was thinking of you this morning. I met Sylvia on the street yesterday and she said that she was going to the sea-shore next month and that you were going to Mrs. Martin's for a visit. Why can't you come here instead?"

"I could," answered Nona smiling. "It isn't at all a settled thing that I go to mamma now. I'd rather come here, please ma'am."

Mrs. Wilson divested herself of her wraps and garden gloves and sat down in a big rocking-chair before the open fire, putting her feet on the fender to take off the chill. "Nona, child," she said, "I used to think I could never stand a lot of noise and the clatter of young voices in the house again, but of late I have been longing for it. Do you think — would you like to invite some of your friends here to spend Easter week? That young man, the college student, and your cousins — a half dozen or so wouldn't be too

many. I've been thinking it over and if you would like it, Benona, I would."

Nona went over and gave her a hug. "You dear grandy, of course I'd like it; I'd love it, and you are a dear to think of it. But are you sure it wouldn't worry you?"

"No, it wouldn't; I think I should like it; at any rate I want to try it and I think while Sylvia is away you may be lonely, and you have such lively times when you go visiting, so — I thought —"

"I know just what you thought, grandma, and I love you for it. I am going to tell you a secret: some day — I don't know just when — but there are signs which mean that I shall not always live with Sylvia. I think Graham would like to have her all to himself and then —"

"You'll come to me," her grandmother said triumphantly. "Oh, child, let it be soon."

"It's going to be soon in one way, for when Sylvia gets off I will come right here, and oh, grandy, we'll write to Margie and Maurice. I don't know whether Maurice can come or not, but if he can it would be nice to have Ada; and

Julian will come I know, and Jim, if he can get away. That will be just the crowd we had last summer. Oh, grandma, it will be just too much fun for anything. But what will Aunt Hannah say? and can we manage so many?"

"I'll manage Aunt Hannah. We can have her granddaughter to help and that will satisfy her, and — let me see — about the rooms."

"I can take Margie in with me, and that will leave the little bedroom for Ada, and the others for the boys; that will do finely."

"Yes, if you don't mind sharing your room with your cousin."

"Of course I don't mind. Weren't we room-mates and bed-fellows for three years at school? Besides, my room here is twice as big as the one we had at school. Will you write to them or shall I?"

"You may write and say that it is at my request. It is your house-party, Nona."

"Oh, you dear! and to think I was feeling so blue and doncy as I came along."

"Anything serious?"

"No, only Sylvia looks so droopy and — and

— oh, I don't know — I think it is because spring is coming and one gets into a queer state then; teary and longy and heart-swelly and all that."

"Humph!" Mrs. Wilson was thoughtful for a moment. "Have you seen Mr. Harwood lately?" she asked abruptly.

"I saw him across the street as I was on my way here. He spent the evening with us a couple of weeks ago."

"I never could quite understand," Mrs. Wilson began. "You liked him, Nona, at first, and he was — I am sure he was attracted to you; that was one reason why — "

"Why you liked him, you dear grandy? Well, if all is true that one hears, he was very devoted to Miss Patterson when she was in town. She was an old flame of his, I believe, and so — you see, grandma."

"I see. Be sure you write a particularly pressing invitation to your college lad. I want him anyhow."

Nona laughed. "He is Mr. Harwood's cousin, you know," she said, and settled herself to the task of writing the notes which Mrs. Wilson

insisted should be despatched at once lest there should be other plans made by those whom they wished to come.

The notes were mailed on Nona's way home and in a few days came the answers. Julian and Margaret accepted joyfully; Maurice could come for a couple of days anyhow; Jim would come if he could, and Ada would let them know in a few days. Therefore the week before Easter when Sylvia set forth to Atlantic City Nona turned toward her grandmother's with a feeling of pleasant anticipation. She had been longing to do something of this kind ever since she left school, but since the breaking up of her home she had realized that there was no spot where she was free to offer entertainment to her individual friends, and this was such a delightful plan.

The old farm-house was picturesque in that it had been added to and lengthened out so that it had not a commonplace aspect. It had wide porches above and below, and to the original building had been built a wing on a wing so that one end was quite separated from the other by a wide stairway. The large bedrooms over the

parlor and library were set aside for the young men, the goats, as Nona called them, while the feminine part of the household were relegated to the other end, the rooms over hall, sitting-room and dining-room. Over the main part of the house ran a large attic and above this was a cupola, a favorite retreat for Nona.

The crocuses and daffodils were in bloom in the flower borders, and in the windows of the sitting-room were blossoming plants of geraniums and divers other things, so that a cheerier place could not be imagined. Thad had furbished up the old carryall, and Nona was to drive the buggy to meet the guests. It was with no little excitement that both the girl and her grandmother awaited the arrivals. Sylvia was quite charmed at the plan when told of it. That Julian should be coming suited her exactly, and she hoped it would further his cause. She was glad, too, that Nona would have this pleasure, for, to do her justice, she did wish to take her sister with her but had received so little encouragement from her husband when she broached the subject that she had not insisted. "Nona does not really care

for Atlantic City," she told herself and had gone away quite content.

When the train pulled into the station Nona looked eagerly for her friends. There they were, wildly waving to her, and she ran forward to meet them.

"Isn't this great?" cried Julian, getting hold of her hand.

"Oh, Nona, I'm perfectly wild," cried Margaret, clutching her arm.

"Isn't your grandma a dear?" said Ada, her hand on Nona's shoulder.

"Who speaks to go with me in the buggy?" asked Nona.

"I! I!" cried Margaret, and "I," said Julian.

"I can't take both," said Nona ruefully, "as it is, we shall be crowded. Let me see, five in the carryall, and two in the buggy or four in the carryall and three in the buggy; which shall it be?"

"Let us girls all go in the buggy; we can squeeze in if it's wide," said Margaret.

"Oh, it is wide; a perfect ark," Nona told her.

"Come on then, we'll get in and leave the boys to their own devices." And before the young men knew what they were about they were all settled.

"I say," cried Jim, "that is too bad. You oughtn't to flock off that way by yourselves." But Nona only laughed and touched up the old horse who started off leaving Thad with his load to follow.

"I believe if I had been given the pleasures of the universe to choose from I couldn't have selected anything lovelier than this," said Margaret enthusiastically. "To think of the whole crowd of us under one roof for all this time. Do you think your grandmother will want us to be very proper and stiff?"

"Indeed she will not," returned Nona. "She is a bit of a martinet, and can be very sarcastic when she chooses, but when she pleases she can be the most delightful person in the world, and she is never strait-laced; that isn't one of her angles."

Mrs. Wilson on this occasion pleased to be the most delightful person in the world as Nona had expressed it, and welcomed her young guests with

a fine courtesy and graciousness which at once put them at their ease. "She is a darling," whispered Margaret, and the spontaneous remark being heard by Mrs. Wilson, Margaret's place was assured. Ada, a little more shy and reserved, did not make quite so favorable an impression, but to Julian Mrs. Wilson was specially gracious, giving him at table the place of honor at her right hand. She always insisted upon doing the carving herself, and Nona's seat was behind the coffee urn.

If Mrs. Wilson wished to know how it would seem to hear young voices about the house, she certainly had the opportunity afforded her, for within twenty-four hours the whole party had made themselves perfectly at home. Gay waltzes and popular songs floated out upon the air; there were bursts of laughter and girlish squeals; there were manly shouts and friendly scuffles, and more than once during the day Mrs. Wilson would stand still and listen, a smile upon her face. Nona was exuberant and her grandmother watched her with fond affection. "That's what the child has been needing," she said to herself;

"companions of her own age who understand and love her." Margaret's devotion and Julian's attentions were not unobserved, and in consequence these two were singled out for special favor.

"You are going to have real country eggs," said Nona on Easter morning; "none of your paste and chocolate affairs," and when they all appeared at the breakfast table they found before each place a little nest in which were two eggs daintily decorated by Nona's clever fingers.

Jim took up one gingerly. "What artistic hens you have," he said. "You surely don't expect us to eat these?"

"That is as you choose," Nona told him, "but if you prefer a plainer and fresher variety they will be forthcoming from the kitchen."

"Oh, we'll keep these, of course," said Margaret; "they are too pretty for anything; hand-painted, as the shop-girls would tell us."

"That reminds me of a seamstress we had here last fall," said Nona. "She wanted to know if my grandfather's portrait was hand-painted and if the frame were solid gold or plated. Who is going to church this morning?"

"Why all of us, of course," replied Margaret.

"Then come into the garden, Maud, and we'll gather some daffy-down-dillys to wear. They are such dear, sunshiny things; I love them." But they dallied so long at table that no one seemed to have time to gather the blossoms but Julian and Nona.

"Let me get those you will wear," said Julian.

Nona laughed. "Very well, Mr. Sentimental, go ahead."

"Won't you get me some little thing for my buttonhole?"

"Why yes, if you like. Grandma will spare you a few of her precious violets, I know; they are round on the south side of the house under the frames. I'll go get you some while you are gathering these." She left him, returning in a few minutes with a tiny bunch of sweet violets which she presented in due form.

"Please pin them on my coat," said Julian, and Nona obeyed.

At this moment Maurice appeared on the porch. "Is that where you get the flowers?" he said. "May I come, too?"

"Certainly," answered Nona; "come right along."

"I thought I'd like to gather a few for Ada," said Maurice; "she won't have time to gather them for herself."

"Take all you want," Nona told him. "I have only Margaret to think of, it seems." But she had hardly begun to gather Margaret's daffodils when Jim came sauntering out.

"I say," he said, "let me get some for somebody, too."

"There is only Margaret to be provided for," Nona told him with a little twinkle of the eye. "Julian is getting mine and Maurice has some for Ada; I am sorry you have no choice in the matter for I don't believe grandma will care to carry anything so bright as daffodils." Jim did not heed her teasing remarks but busied himself in gathering the flowers. Nona mounted the steps and stood there laughingly watching the three who gravely added flower to flower. Seeing her grandmother at the window she ran in and joined her. "Isn't that a pretty sight?" she said. "Look at those three devoted swains.

What shall I get you, grandma? Oh, I know." She ran out again, but as she went down the path toward the gate she met a boy bearing a box.

"Miss Nona Ridgely?" he asked.

"I am Miss Ridgely."

"Then this here's for you."

Nona took the box and opened it then and there. Inside was a large bunch of trailing arbutus with Mr. Harwood's card. The color rushed up to the girl's face. Julian had noticed the messenger and now joined Nona. Jim and Maurice, with their hands full of flowers, went in-doors.

Nona had slipped the card back into the box but stood holding the flowers. "Some Mayflowers some one has sent me," she made answer.

"I say, that's too bad," said Julian crestfallen; "now you will not want to wear mine."

Nona returned the flowers to the box. "Oh, yes, I will," she said. "Thank you, Julian, I am going to wear yours, for you gathered them expressly for me."

"That's awfully good of you," he said with such evident sincerity that Nona for the first time began to believe in the reality of his feeling for her.

"I'll carry them in the other way," she said, "if you will get a few sprays of lilies-of-the-valley for grandma; there are some just over there." And with the box under her arm and Julian's daffodils in her hand she went around to the kitchen and slipped up to her room by the back way. Depositing the arbutus in a vase and hiding the card in her desk she went out to seek Ada and Margaret. She found them putting on their hats. "You must carry extra hat-pins down stairs, girls," she said, "for you are going to have the novel experience of wearing Easter flowers that have been gathered by the hands that will present them to you. No roses from the florists, but just honest little country daffodils that come up year after year of their own accord."

"They are twice as valuable as roses would have been," said Ada with shining eyes as Maurice gave her the flowers.

"And I'll love to wear anything that was gathered from Mrs. Wilson's garden," said Margaret as Jim held out to her the yellow blooms.

"Even if it should happen to be a bunch of

onions?" asked Jim. And Margaret immediately turned her back upon him.

"We will look like a bushel of sunshine when we walk into church," said Nona laughing as she saw the array of daffodils. "But then there can't be too much sunshine for Easter and we needn't sit side by side; some of us can go into Graham's pew since he and Sylvia are away."

After service they encountered Mr. Harwood at the church door. He glanced quickly at Nona's daffodils, but she kept her head turned toward Julian. "You are coming out to dine with us, you know, Mr. Harwood," said Mrs. Wilson.

"Indeed I am. I have been looking forward to the pleasure ever since I received your kind note. May I take some one with me in my buggy? Miss Nona, will you go?"

"Oh, I must drive," said Nona. "No one can get such speed out of old Barney as I can."

"Then, Mrs. Wilson, may I have the pleasure of your company?" Mrs. Wilson took in the situation; the others would not care to be separated she well knew, so she allowed herself to be helped into the buggy and was home long before the others whose steeds were anything but swift.

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT THE FOREST DID

Nona ignored Mr. Harwood almost entirely, though she found occasion to thank him for his flowers. "If he thinks he can be Miss Patterson's devoted admirer one day and mine the next, he is mistaken," she said to herself. And so Julian found her unusually sweet and considerate, while Mr. Harwood looked on and believed his cause lost. Even Mrs. Wilson used some diplomacy in keeping him away from Nona and made one or two remarks which led him to believe that Julian was in high favor. Mrs. Wilson had not forgotten Nona's proud look when she told her grandmother of Mr. Harwood's attentions to Sylvia's friend, and the grandmother had said to herself: "My girl shall not stand such things; the young man needs a lesson and he shall have it." And so it was Julian who played Nona's accompaniment when she sang; it

was Julian's flowers she wore, and it was Julian with whom she took a long walk that Easter afternoon. When she returned Mr. Harwood had departed and Mrs. Wilson was alone; the others, having followed Nona's example, had gone to the woods.

"Did you enjoy your walk?" asked Nona's grandmother as she came into the sitting-room.

"Yes, grandma; it is a lovely day and just right for walking."

"Where is Mr. North?"

"He is on the porch taking a smoke."

"Mr. Harwood did not stay."

"No?" Then after a pause, Nona said, "He sent me some flowers this morning; some trailing arbutus, a big bunch."

"And you did not wear it?"

"No, I didn't want to. I preferred to wear what Julian gathered."

"Take care, Nona; don't be too kind to Julian unless you mean it honestly."

Nona perched herself on the arm of the chair in which her grandmother had seated herself. "I'm not too nice. He knows just how I feel.

He ought to, for I have told him often enough. We are good comrades and that is all. Don't bother about Julian, grandma; he will be in love many more times before he marries."

"But Margaret says he has never devoted himself so steadily to any other girl."

"That's because I won't let him say foolish things to me, and it is a really good honest friendship."

"And Mr. Harwood's is not a good honest friendship?"

"It isn't an honest anything, and never can be, so what is the use of trying to make it so?" Nona slapped her gloves together impatiently.

"But, Nona, I am sure— Oh, my dear, if you could have seen the look he gave you to-day when he thought no one saw. If ever a man cared—"

"No, no," Nona interrupted her sharply, "it can never be, grandma. If he grovelled in the dust at my feet and if I wept my eyes out for him it could never be."

"But, Nona, why? There is nothing in the world against Mr. Harwood. He is a man of fine character, of ability, and by no means a pau-

per. If he honestly cares for you, believes in you, why cannot you respond?"

"Ah, but he does not believe in me," Nona went on, and was suddenly silent, troubled at her incautious speech.

"Why, Nona! Ah, child, there is something more here than you will tell. Won't you trust your granny? Old heads are sometimes wiser than young ones."

Nona laid her cheek against her grandmother's. "Dear grandy, I would tell if I could, but it is not my secret. There, let us talk of something else. Do you know what Margie said? She thinks I ought certainly to spend half the year with you and half with Sylvia and by degrees to increase your share of the time and decrease Sylvia's."

"Margaret is a girl of good sense," said Mrs. Wilson decidedly.

"She is a darling."

"How should you like to have her stay on and make us a longer visit. Would she care to?"

"She'd enjoy it, I know, and so should I."

"Then we'll ask her." Mrs. Wilson gave a

satisfied smile. This was a sure means of keeping Nona.

"It is too bad that Maurice and Jim have to go back Tuesday night," Nona went on. "Don't you like them all, grandma?"

"Yes, and Margaret the best."

"I am so glad, for she is my very dearest friend, and I wanted you to like her. She thinks you are fine."

"She doesn't know me," laughed Mrs. Wilson. "I've kept my claws pretty well hidden these last two or three days. I am afraid I will surprise her some of these times. One never stops making mistakes, Nona," she added gravely. "It doesn't do to set up your opinion with too much force, nor to shut yourself away from pleasant influences, nor to believe yours are the only rights in the world to be considered. For so many years I have felt bitterly toward your father because he took a second wife and I have extended my dislike to all the members of his family except yourself; it was a harsh and foolish thing to do. I was not right. These young people are doing me good and are teaching me justice. I

have learned much from Mr. Harwood since he has been coming here, and next here come your cousins and these other friends of yours who, by their perfectly natural and unprejudiced talk, have shown me several things I ought to have known long ago. Oh, yes, Nona, I have made no mistake in that direction; I was right in asking them to come. I may even have a good word for Sylvia yet, who knows?" she concluded with a laugh.

Nona laughed, too. "You don't mean half you say about Sylvia; I have found that out. I know what you mean about the mistakes; I am beginning to have less confidence, for where you have been too suspicious I have been too trustful so that I was in danger of becoming a Nona-entity, but I shall assert myself now, grandma, you will see; I have already begun it and neither Sylvia nor you will find me a meek-spirited maiden hereafter. There, the girls have come; I hear them. This was a nice Easter talk, grandy." She gave her a kiss and went out to meet the others. Jim and Maurice tarried on the porch with Julian, Ada went directly to her room, while Margaret lingered below stairs.

"We had the loveliest walk," she said, "and we found ever so many dear little wild flowers. It does make one feel so Eastery to go out into the woods, and it makes one so — so — I don't know exactly what, but as if you couldn't do any pretending or be anything but just your honest self under those great trees. I am afraid I should do something rash if I took that walk with Jim very often," she concluded with a half embarrassed laugh.

"Why rash ?" asked Nona.

"It seems a little that way. Jim began to say sentimental things, something he doesn't often do, and I didn't stop him as I always do, and so — so — you see if I hadn't suddenly come to a realizing sense of what it was drifting into there is no telling what would have happened. I don't want anything to happen in just that way, when one is under the influence of all such romantic things; I want to be sure of myself under the most prosaic circumstances and then I'll know it is good and solid."

Nona laughed. "That is sound sense, Margie, and when the time comes may I be on hand to

hear it. By the way, grandma and I want you to stay on and make us a longer visit. Can you? Will you?"

"You may believe I can and will. I think she is a darling, as I said at first. You will not be going back to Sylvia's then?"

"Of course not while you are here. Won't we have cosy times?"

"We will indeed."

"Where is Ada?"

"She went up to change her dress. I must go, too; my boots are muddy. Come on up with me, Nona." They mounted the stairs, stopping at Ada's door which was shut. "Nearly ready, Ada?" called Margaret, giving a tap.

There was a muffled answer and the girls outside went on to their own room. Presently Ada appeared in a pale blue dress, her dark eyes soft and luminous, a tremulous little smile playing around her mouth.

Margaret looked at her for a moment. "Why, Ada," she said, "you look like an Easter decoration, or a choir of angels or golden harps or something ecstatic. Ada!" She caught her in her

arms. "Did that walk in the woods get the best of you?"

Ada blushed and gave Margaret a mighty hug. "Oh, Margie, do you mind? Shall you like me just as well when I am — Oh, Margie — yes — I — Maurice —"

"Enough," cried Margaret; "I understand. Bless you, my child. I always have wanted a sister, and as long as it wouldn't be proper for first cousins to marry and I can't have Nona, I'll be glad to take you and thank you, ma'am. Nona, allow me to present my sister-in-law, Mrs. Maurice Foster."

Nona came forward and gave Ada a kiss. "You dear girl," she said, "I am so glad of this; I'd hate to have Maurice marry a stranger, and we all have been hoping for this and expecting it."

"Oh, have you?" said Ada innocently. "How could you?" At which both of the other girls laughed and they all went down stairs together.

Then came a great time with congratulations and chaffings and such. Maurice had already acquainted Julian and Jim with the state of affairs,

and Mrs. Wilson when told, said they must celebrate the event by a specially adorned supper-table, so all her old silver was brought out, her violet bed was robbed of all its newly opened violets, and the meal was made quite a state affair.

"Where is cousin Ran?" asked Ada.

"He had promised to take supper with the Duvalls," Mrs. Wilson said, "and I could not persuade him to stay."

The evening was a happy one for all of them. First they sang Easter hymns, and then Nona and Julian turned to the oratorio of "The Messiah" which both loved and which Julian played well. In the library Maurice and Ada talked in low murmurs; Jim and Margaret joined Mrs. Wilson in the sitting-room, preferring the open fire and the bright talk of the old lady to the music, of which after a while they tired.

At bed-time Ada lifted her face to Mrs. Wilson for a kiss. "I am so happy," she whispered. "Dear Mrs. Wilson, you don't know how happy my coming here has made me. I shall never, never forget this day."

Mrs. Wilson's eyes were very tender as she kissed her. "Good-night, dear child," she said gently; "I think we are all happier because of your happiness."

After she was ready for bed Margaret put on a wrapper and pattered into Ada's room where the two whispered together for a long time. Nona took her May-flowers from their vase and looked at them thoughtfully, then her eyes filled with tears and she dropped a light kiss on the sweet blossoms. "Oh, you dear little things," she murmured, "I could have been happy, too, maybe, and now I never will be; never, never; it is no use; it is just as hard now as it ever was. I believe it grows harder." She set back the flowers into their vase and put them outside the window on the sill, all but one tiny sprig which she fastened to her night-dress, and whose subtle, faint odor was her last waking solace.

The next day Nona and Julian insisted upon photographing the newly engaged couple in all sorts of lights and poses, and having fallen under the spell of the camera they started forth for fresh subjects. There was enough of the quaint

and picturesque in the neighborhood to satisfy Julian's wish for something artistic, whether it was a little ragamuffin who called out, "Take me off, lady"; whether it was an old gray-headed darkey with a bunch of faggots on his back, or whether it was a bit of winding river and a sail-boat drifting idly along.

"The more you take the more you find," said Julian. "I never saw such a place; you stumble upon pictures at every turn. My camera was loaded with a dozen films when we came out and I have used every one. I know Ada will revel in those we took this morning; I wish we knew just where they were when the great matter was settled; I'd take a photograph of the spot."

"I know," Nona told him; "we are coming to the woods now." She remembered Margaret's speech about the effect of the woods upon her and Jim, and she talked in her lightest vein when they entered the silent forest.

"It's no wonder," said Julian, standing still and looking about him, "that this takes hold of a fellow." He was silent for a moment, and then he turned to his companion. "Don't you think

I have been uncommonly good these past days, Miss Nona? I've not been sentimental once, except when I wanted to gather you the flowers. I'm beginning to believe this is the real thing. I don't seem to care about fooling the way I used to. When I meet a pretty girl and begin to say soft things to her I feel like a fool and I always think of you directly."

"Oh, Julian," exclaimed Nona in mock distress, "you think of me and directly you feel like a fool? Do I understand the implication aright?"

"Now, Miss Nona. No, I am going to call you Nona, may I? You won't care, will you? We shall be sort of relations, you know, when my sister becomes your cousin."

"That is true. Well, I don't mind. I've been calling you by your first name this long while."

"Well, as I was saying, I do think of you and it keeps me from lots of foolishness. A really fine girl doesn't know how much foolishness she can keep a man from doing. He feels sort of ashamed of being less than she wants him to be, and he wants to be worthy of her respect and all that. It is so, and you can laugh at it or not."

"I'm not laughing," said Nona very seriously. "I didn't know, but I am glad if you do feel that way, Julian, and I am your really honest, true friend, you know that."

"I believe that, and there's not another girl who would have said the things you have said to me, and have stirred up this desire to — to —"

"To stop fooling and be the good, sincere man you ought to be and can be."

"Yes, that is it. Nona, I believe I'll be hard hit if this goes on; I truly do."

Nona looked distressed. She did not wish to lose her influence over the lad and yet she could not encourage him. "You mustn't let yourself be hard hit, and you must be good for the sake of the goodness and not for my sake."

"I know, but you said yourself that a fellow couldn't help it if it were the real thing."

"I remember that I said that, but you are very young yet, Julian, and you have your studies to think of and your future career and all that. When you leave college it will be time enough for you to say what you think; in the meantime let us keep on being really good, true friends. I'll do all I can to keep my end up."

"I know that well enough; you don't feel as I do, not the least little bit, I am afraid. I thought yesterday that maybe you did, for you wore my flowers instead of the other fellow's, whoever he is."

"Oh!" Nona gave a sharp little expostulatory cry. She had been more than usually kind to him, and had sacrificed him to her own ends, she realized that now. "I don't believe I do feel as you do," she said honestly, "but I like you immensely, Julian, and we must always be fast friends."

"So we will," returned Julian, "and if you never do care except in the way you do now, I'm not such a duffer as to drop you and all that; I'll be proud of your friendship to the end of my life."

This was all very sweet to the girl, a very balm to her after that other affair into which no such sweet approval entered, and when Julian bent his head and kissed her hand, she felt a little thrill which made her wonder whether, after all, she might not some day give him the love he asked. She was rather subdued for the rest of the day;

the sensation of having been suddenly set up as a guiding star in a young man's sky was not an unpleasant one; it was vastly more agreeable to be considered a saint than a sinner.

The next day was rainy, and the whole company stayed in-doors. This was no trial to Ada and Maurice, for the house abounded in pleasant nooks where one could read or talk undisturbed. Indeed, nobody appeared to mind the weather. Julian and Nona developed their films in a corner of the attic which they made sufficiently dark for the purpose, and there was a great candy-making in the afternoon, Jim and Margaret being the ones to volunteer to drive into town for the purpose of getting the required materials. They came back full of fun and laden down with packages of peanuts, walnuts, sugar and such things.

"We saw Mr. Harwood in town," said Margaret, "and he looked as if he had lost his last friend. Does a rainy day always affect him so? We thought it was fine. Get the boys, Nona, and make them shell the peanuts."

"They'll eat half of them," said prudent Nona.

"Never mind if they do," returned Margaret,

"then they'll not eat so much of the candy; besides there are plenty of nuts and it will be more fun if we make them help."

They did not dare to invade Aunt Hannah's domain, but used a kerosene stove in the dining-room and made a great time of their frolic. "Did you ever see such a looking place," said Margaret when the last pan of candy was set aside to cool. "We must clear up the mess before supper. Who dares to take the peanut shells out into the kitchen?"

"Nonsense; they needn't go there," said Jim. "What's the matter with the sitting-room fire? Dump them in there; they will make a fine blaze."

"So they will, but all these pots and pans and bowls must be put out of the way."

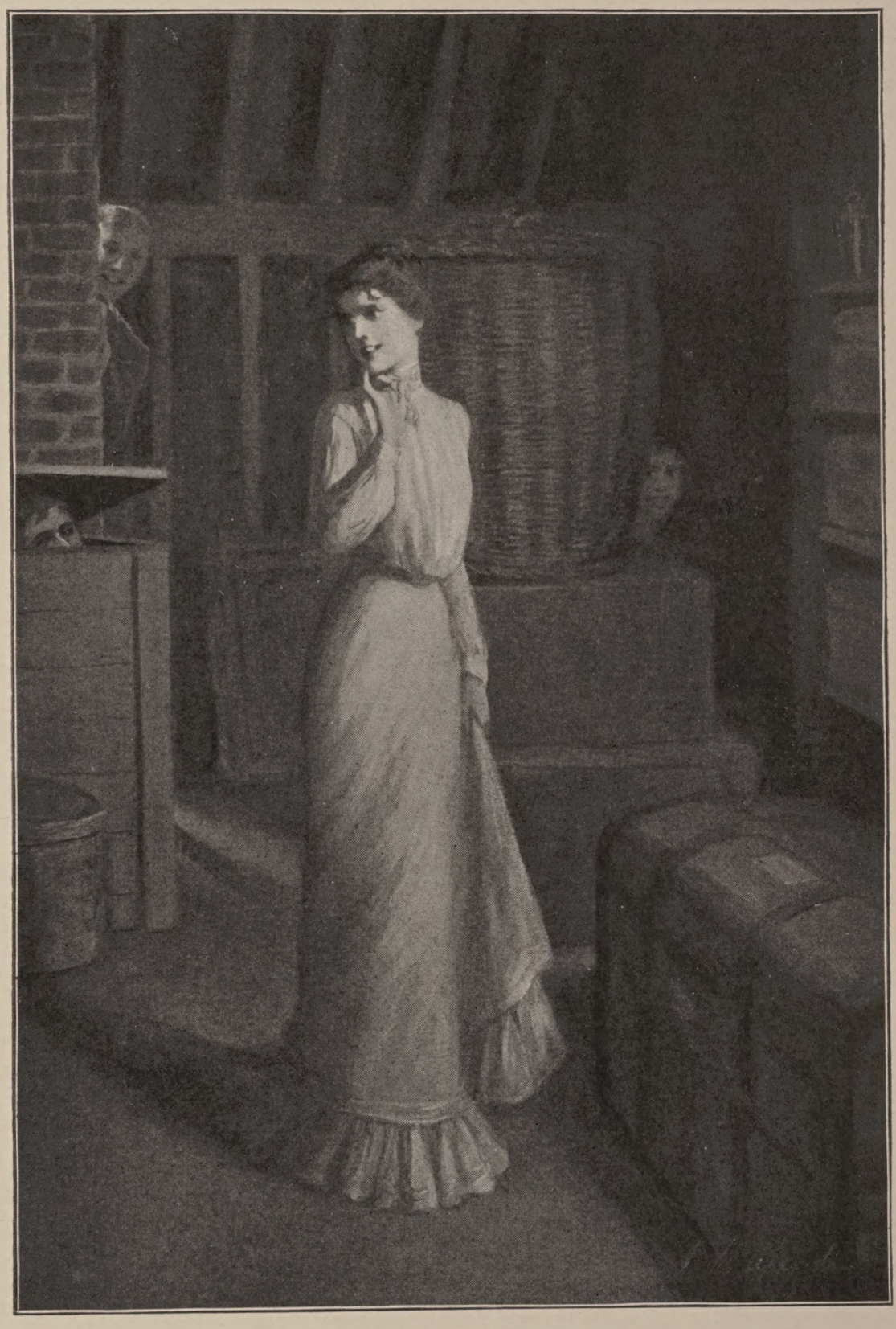
"Kitty will attend to them," said Nona. "If we give her plenty of candy she will do anything; we needn't bother with those. Dear me, I feel as if I never wanted to see another peanut. We'll never be able to eat any supper."

"Oh yes, we will," said Jim cheerfully. "You all haven't been out to-day; you ought to have some exercise."

"Exercise? Haven't we been stirring and mixing and fussing over this stuff?" returned Margaret. "Oh, Nona, we might go up into the attic and play some foolish game like hide and seek; that would be fun and give us exercise, too."

At this they all started pell-mell up the stairs, the obliging Kitty having promised to tidy up the dining-room when Nona bribed her with a heaped-up saucer of candy. As the scampering feet went flying up to the attic Mrs. Wilson laid down her work and listened, with a smile upon her face; then she sighed. "I never knew what a quiet house it was till now," she thought; "it does me good to hear those youngsters. Nona shall have all the company she wants, if that will keep her here."

The night train took Maurice and Jim away, but the others remained. At the end of the week Ada and Julian also took their leave, Margaret alone remaining behind. So when Sylvia returned home bringing Ethel Patterson with her, she found Nona established at her grandmother's with no intention of taking her departure while Margaret kept her company.



PLAYING HIDE AND SEEK

CHAPTER XVII

NONA'S RIVAL

"It seems rather quiet, doesn't it?" said Nona as Margaret and she settled themselves in the sitting-room after they had come home from seeing Ada and Julian to the station. "That is the worst of having a houseful; you miss them so dreadfully when they are gone. What should I have done without you, Margie?"

"I am glad I could stay," Margaret returned, contentedly looking into the fire. "I feel so at home in this old house, and yet I have never been here since I was a mite of a child, until this visit. I remember coming here then with Sylvia and your mother and you were here, and insisted upon washing my face, much to my disgust."

Nona laughed. "I don't remember that, but it was quite characteristic, for I was given to dabbling in water and I have more visions of soaked frocks than of any other calamity. Speak-

ing of dabbling in water, I am going to try to make some water-color sketches, using the motifs that Julian found for his photographs; he has a real genius for good composition and I don't know much about that yet."

"I verily believe you and Julian will soon follow the example of Maurice and Ada."

"Not a bit of it; you needn't make up any pretty little romance about us, for it will be no use."

"But he does improve, and it is plain to see whose influence is at work. You mustn't trifle with his young affections, Nona."

"His young affections will stand a considerable amount of trifling," Nona returned lightly. "Do you suppose Ada and Maurice will marry soon?"

"Oh dear, no; not for a year or two anyhow. I really didn't think Maurice would settle matters now, but he says the woods were too much for him, just as they came near being for me. I think he has always liked Ada ever since she first came to Fairington to live, but I used to be afraid that it was only a passing fancy on his

part and a more serious matter to Ada. Maurice is a good fellow, but he is not above the ordinary masculine weaknesses."

"How sagely you talk," laughed Nona. "Now if I had a brother I suppose I should never admit that he had a fault and I should fairly worship him."

"Of course you would, just as you adore Sylvia. She certainly is a beauty, but she is not half as lovable as you are, to my thinking, and that is where your grandmother and I agree."

"Nonsense! that's because neither of you know Sylvia as I do. She has the most fetching ways and —"

"Can wheedle you into doing anything. I know that."

"That isn't what I was going to say."

"Very likely not."

"She is much more demonstrative than I, and always has some sweet thing to say to anyone who comes in, and always sends off her visitors feeling comfortable, while I am likely to blurt out some unpleasant truth which rubs some one the wrong way."

"I don't care; I'd rather have your sincerity any day."

"But it doesn't make me as popular as Sylvia."

"It does where persons know you well; I'd rather be trusted than admired."

"So would I," sighed Nona, at once pensively beginning to poke the fire. "You will meet Ethel Patterson to-morrow when we go to Sylvia's to lunch. I wonder how you will like her."

"Is she very attractive?"

"I don't know her very well, but —"

"That speaks volumes. Is she pretty?"

"Not exactly. Handsome rather than pretty. She is quite a foil to Sylvia, for she is dark. She dresses in a bizarre sort of way which reminds you of an Indian princess. She wears clinging stuffs and Oriental scarfs and queer jingling chains and bracelets, and she always carries a sandal-wood fan, and when she comes near you there is a faint, odd perfume that you can't define."

"I should think she would be rather interesting."

"Sylvia finds her so, but —"

"That but again. Tell me Nona what it means."

"It doesn't mean anything in particular. I don't like to criticize; it wouldn't be right, you know."

"Just tell me your impression."

"I'll wait till you have seen her and then you can tell me what you think and we'll see if we agree." She was silent for a moment, meantime making hieroglyphics in the ashes. "Mr. Harwood is very devoted to her, you know," she said at last. "At least Sylvia said he paid her a great deal of attention while I was in New York."

"Why, Nona, I thought he was your special cavalier. I am positive he sent you that trailing arbutus at Easter."

"What makes you think so?"

"Oh, I put this and that together. I don't believe he is in love with Miss Patterson."

"Why?"

"Oh, because — I don't. I have eyes to see with and ears to hear with, and if you treated him half decently you would see, too. If he did de-

vote himself to Miss Patterson it was very likely because he wanted to make you jealous."

"Oh no, you are wrong; he used to know her when they were younger, before he came here to live. Sylvia thinks that is why he came; because she had jilted him."

"I think that is far-fetched. We know he came because he and Bennett Duvall had always planned to go into partnership, and if he was so cut up about Miss Patterson why is he devoted to her now? If she jilted him I don't think he is the man to go back to her. Isn't it funny, Nona, how Maurice's marriage will connect us all more closely with these people, and if you were to marry Julian it would be closer still. You would be Mr. Harwood's cousin."

Nona made no reply. Julian was not in her thoughts just then. She rather dreaded the next day's luncheon, but with Margaret as a support she was ready to face it. "Some persons shut me up just like a clam, and Ethel Patterson is one of them," she told her cousin; "she has a way of monopolizing the conversation and yet she is the most frothy sort of person; what she says

amounts to absolutely nothing, but she makes it seem important by her way of saying it. If she tells you that she crossed the street she does it in such a way that you hold your breath till she is safely over."

Margaret laughed. "She'll not monopolize the conversation if I am around, do you think?"

"Not if you carry out your usual programme, but I warn you that Miss Patterson is very sensational and must have excitement even if she creates it for nobody but herself. You can't help laughing at her sometimes, for she does often say very audacious, funny things. There, I have discussed her enough. I'll leave the rest to your perceptions."

Margaret was quite curious to meet Miss Patterson, and she was determined that whatever happened Nona should not be made to appear to disadvantage. "Put on your prettiest gown," she said. "Let me see, what shall it be?"

"Not the gray silk?"

"No, it will not be impressive enough. That soft green with the white fixings, I think. You look dear in that. I'll do the sash for you in the

very latest style. Puff your hair a little more and — no, I think it will be better just that way. Your eyes look like two deep wells of water; they reflect all sorts of colors; they are changeful and yet so steady, and you have the sweetest mouth in the world."

"You flatterer, don't talk so!"

"That is the strict truth, and no flattery at all." Margaret was bound to arouse all Nona's self-esteem on this occasion, and truly the girl did look her best, graceful, high-bred and sweet.

Sylvia received the girls with much effusion. "I am so glad you were able to get here," she said. "I was afraid it would rain or that something would happen to prevent your coming. We mustn't feel like strangers to each other, Margie, even if we haven't seen much of one another since we grew up. I want you to meet Ethel; she is such a friend of mine and I know you will like her. How sweet you look in that frock. Why, Nona, you are quite dressed up. I am glad you cared to do Ethel and me so much honor. Emily is coming and Louise Snowden, too, but there are no formalities for we are all old friends."

She ushered the girls into the library where Miss Patterson sat. This young woman was, as Nona had said, rather bizarre in appearance. Her gown of soft gold-colored silk was made in some unique fashion with flowing sleeves and Persian trimmings; a chain encircled her waist, and from it hung a sandal-wood fan, a vinaigrette of curious form and several other pendants. She wore heavy rings and bracelets of queer design, and the embroidered scarf which hung on the chair beside her was evidently a part of her costume. Her voice was not unpleasant, but she spoke quickly and excitedly even upon trivial subjects. She greeted Margaret with warmth but paid little attention to Nona who involuntarily kept in the background.

But it was plain to see that Margaret would have none of that. "What a dear little home you have, Sylvia," she said, "and how plain to see Nona's hand in everything. Isn't it fine to have such a clever sister? There doesn't seem to be anything she can't do. Did you ever hear Nona sing, Miss Patterson? Her voice is lovely, and — oh yes, that is one of those little sketches you

did at Fairington last summer; I thought I recognized it. Nona is so modest; look how she is blushing. Dear me, if I were half as clever as she is I'd blazon it abroad."

"She is a clever dear," responded Sylvia sweetly. "I do miss her so whenever she is away."

And then Miss Patterson broke in with: "Did I ever show you that little sketch Miss Woods made for me, Sylvia? It is perfectly charming, but then Miss Woods is a real artist; her last work at the Salon was so much admired." It was one of Miss Patterson's peculiarities that she was sure to know some one who knew more or did better or had more than the person of whom you were telling her.

"I've seen Miss Woods' work," said Margaret nonchalantly. "I don't think so much of it, especially when it is that of a person who has studied all her life. Nona could out-do her in no time if she were to study seriously."

Miss Patterson lifted her eyebrows and gave Margaret a little surprised and haughty stare which that young person answered with her

sweetest smile and with a quick turn of her head. "Do you see a spider or something, Miss Patterson?" she asked. But that young lady was spared an answer by the entrance of Emily Duvall and Louise Snowden, and though for the rest of the time Miss Patterson won the race in talking, Margaret was a close second, and more than once silenced Nona's rival. As for Nona she had never been made to appear such a combination of wit, wisdom, and fascination as by Margaret, and Sylvia's quiet sister in the role of a genius and a belle was something for which Miss Patterson was not prepared.

Yet the young woman did not lose her chances of trying to make Nona aware of the effect of her charms upon Randolph Harwood, whom she had reason to suspect was an admirer of Nona's. Under pretext of showing something to her, she carried Nona off to her room, laughingly telling the others they need not follow. "You are so clever I wonder if you can tell me who painted this, the original, I mean," and she took a small colored picture from her dressing table. "I picked it up down town the other day, for I admired it, al-

though it is only a reproduction, and Mr. Harwood and I had quite a discussion over it last night."

Nona looked at the picture and then turned it over. "The name of the artist is on the back," she said and calmly laid the picture down.

"How stupid of me," said Miss Patterson in some confusion; "I never thought of looking there. You know Mr. Harwood quite well, don't you? We are old, old friends. I have known him all my life and he is just as charming a man as he was a boy. I wonder if you would be interested in seeing some photographs I have of him, taken when he was at college. There is such a funny one, taken when he was sixteen." The photographs in question were evidently within easy reach, for Miss Patterson was not long in producing them.

Nona looked at them carelessly. "He has not changed much," she said.

Miss Patterson regarded each picture earnestly. "No, he is not one to change," she said with meaning. "I have every reason to know that. I suppose you see him very often, Miss Nona."

But they were interrupted by a merry laugh. "I said I was coming; I was not going to be shut out and I told Sylvia I wanted to see all the house, so she let me come. This is the room you have always had, isn't it, Nona? It has a good view from the windows. Oh, photographs, may I see?"

Miss Patterson had unwillingly invited her to enter, but rather ostentatiously had left the photographs lying face up. "You may see," she said smiling. "I think you probably know the original."

"Oh yes, Randolph Harwood. I easily recognize them. Do you know he is to be a sort of cousin to us, for my brother's engagement to his cousin, Ada North, is just announced, and we shall probably see a good deal of Mr. Harwood in the future. These are not as good as those photographs you have of him, Nona."

"Which ones?" she asked innocently.

"Why those that were taken at Fairington last summer when he came there to see you. Mercy! I suppose you have so many that you can't remember which I mean." The photographs in

question were snap-shots which Julian had taken and which included the others of the party, though they showed a really excellent likeness of Mr. Harwood. Nona did not like to explain and therefore made no response.

Miss Patterson flung the photographs into a drawer. "Let us go down," she proposed. "I have not heard Miss Nona sing."

"You should have heard her last Sunday," said Margaret; "she quite outdid herself. Do you remember that night last summer, Nona, when you and Mr. Harwood sang that same oratorio and Julian played your accompaniment? I shall never forget that evening; everyone said your voices accorded so well. It was quite pathetic, Miss Patterson, to see how Nona was badgered by those two men, and she was always so sweet and accommodating, and never saw that what they were really working for was to get her off to themselves. You would not believe what a stir she made among our friends, she is such a mouse at home."

Miss Patterson made no reply, but as they followed her down stairs Margaret made a little

mouth at Nona, over her shoulder, and Nona smiled. She was afraid Margaret was carrying her zeal too far, though she was grateful for the championship.

As it happened Mrs. Wilson had asked Mr. Harwood to supper that very evening and this fact Margaret determined should not be hidden, so she made it an excuse for a rather early departure, going off with honeyed words to Sylvia but leaving a little sting in her last remark to Miss Patterson.

"Oh you bad child," said Nona when they were safely out of hearing. "How you did act! Sylvia was dumbfounded and kept looking at me as if she had just discovered my existence, and Emily Duvall was so amused, while Miss Patterson will simply abhor me."

"Well, suppose she should; she probably did before," said Margaret coolly.

"What made you say that about those photographs? They were not mine especially, neither were they solely of Mr. Harwood."

"What I said was perfectly true; they are much better than those she has. The horrid

thing! All she took you up there for was to show you those. I don't believe she has one taken within the last six years. What did she make as an excuse to get you up there?"

"She had a picture and asked if I knew the name of the artist."

"Did you?"

"I did after I looked on the back of it."

"Nona! Wasn't that a flimsy excuse?"

"Well, what do you think of my rival?"

"I think she is shallow, and insincere and vain."

"Really?"

"Yes, all that and more, too. Was that what the *but* meant?"

"Yes, just that."

"Is she going to stay long in town?"

"Not very; a week, I believe."

"I don't blame you for admiring Sylvia, for she really has very taking ways and is so pretty. I suspect I did astonish her, but I am glad I could and that I could show them all what we think of you, and how popular you are when you get away with us. I believe," she went on after

a pause, "that down here they value a pretty face more than anything else, while further north they rate one's acquirements as among the personal charms. I find that to be young and pretty is what they expect of a girl who would charm, but in some other places looks don't count for so much as brains and a charm of manner."

"Perhaps that is so, but oh, Margie, I felt very foolish when you went on that way. I didn't know which way to look."

"It wasn't in very good taste to praise you before your face, I admit, and as a rule I hate that sort of thing, and don't often descend to it, but a girl like Miss Patterson is only to be worsted by the use of her own weapons. I think girls can be the meanest, hatefulest things, and I have a little contempt for myself, I must confess, whenever I do meet such as Miss Patterson on her own grounds, but I wasn't going to have her browbeat you, so I had to make the most of my opportunities."

"I think you succeeded," said Nona laughing.

"Will you be nice to Mr. Harwood to-night?"

"I don't know; maybe."

"Let me tell you one thing: I don't believe one word of his being devoted to Miss Patterson. I questioned Sylvia while you were up-stairs and he has been there only once."

"Are you sure? Miss Patterson said she saw him last night."

"Then she must have met him somewhere else, at Mrs. Duvall's probably; they were all there."

"Oh!"

"Yes, it is Oh, in more than one instance, my unsuspicious little dear. You must keep your eyes open when you are dealing with girls like Ethel Patterson. She will insinuate anything, and has made Sylvia believe a great deal more than there is any ground for, I'll answer for that. I am not so very much smitten with Mr. Harwood myself, but I am not going to see you badgered about him by that girl, and as I am beginning to think that his iciness last summer was your fault I am really getting up quite a sympathy for him."

All this had its effect upon Nona and she unbent so far as to be quite natural in her manner that evening, and the hours passed pleasantly,

chiefly because of Margaret's efforts. There was some music, and then the conversation which was general, was made lively by anecdote, Margaret leading off with some very funny tales. The others caught the spirit, and there were no solemn pauses. A week later Margaret left for home, to Nona's regret. There were no more encounters with Miss Patterson, for she did not remain long, a fact which Margaret attributed to her failure in securing Mr. Harwood's individual attention, though in this opinion Nona did not coincide. Sylvia urged Nona's return as soon as Margaret left, but there was less heart than usual in her entreaties and when Nona declared her intention of remaining with her grandmother still longer, Sylvia did not oppose her very strongly.

CHAPTER XVIII

DRIFTING

Having made up her mind to be less difficult and more sympathetic, Mrs. Wilson softened perceptibly in her manner to Sylvia, especially as now Nona was willing to prolong her stay. The old lady more than once went out of her way to meet Sylvia and to invite her and Graham to dinner or to a Sunday supper, so that it came to be quite a usual thing for Sylvia to drive out whenever she wished to see Nona specially. Sometimes she would carry her off for a day or two, and Nona really saw almost as much of her sister as when they were under the same roof, while she found that it was a happier arrangement all around. Since Margaret's championship of her sister, and because of her cousin's few probing questions, Sylvia looked upon Nona with different eyes, and was now quite at daggers drawn with Ethel Patterson, that young woman having shown her

seamy side before she left town. And so as the summer approached the snarls seemed to unwind, all except that one in which Randolph Harwood was concerned.

Once in a while Nona made some faint protest against remaining permanently with her grandmother, but was met savagely. "Will you tell me what Sylvia has ever done for you that she should expect any sacrifice from you?" Mrs. Wilson would ask.

"It isn't sacrifice, grandma, you know I enjoy being with her," Nona replied on one occasion.

"And with that precious husband of hers, too, no doubt," returned the old lady. "Of course you enjoy playing the character of cypher. It puts me out of patience to see the way some people act, as if they were conferring a favor upon the universe to become merely an atom of it, and as if everybody and everything should succumb to them. They must be considered, forsooth, when they have never done a blessed thing to deserve consideration. How many hours has Sylvia spent sewing for you? When has she made a

sacrifice of time or pleasure for your sake? Half the time she under-rates what you do for her, but if she gives you some little trifling present she spreads herself like a peacock and the whole town is made to believe you are a poor dependent upon her husband's bounty. He will remind you of it yet, and tell people that he is impoverishing himself by what he is doing for his wife's family; he is just that kind of man."

"Oh, grandma, it couldn't be as bad as that. I think I am welcome to anything except Sylvia's exclusive society. I am no expense, and I certainly give a return for what I receive."

"You don't have to give a return for what you receive; you have your own home here with me, and I do not choose to have you a dependent. You have a right to all that I have. And though anyone can see with half an eye that you earn all that Sylvia or her husband could give you, she is always blind to what she doesn't want to see, and she loves to pose as Lady Bountiful."

"I am sure she is always very sweet and appreciative when I do anything for her."

"At the moment, yes, but she forgets it the

next week when it suits her to view herself in the light of a benefactress. Sylvia's obligations never weigh heavily; you can comfort yourself with that. It is her way to double the value of anything she does and depreciate your services and gifts till they are mere bagatelles. She is much more comfortable when she adjusts things that way."

Nona felt that there was some unpleasant truth in this hard speech, and at last settled down with no thought of returning permanently to Sylvia, or even of staying with her more than two or three days at a time.

Ethel Patterson had been more than once the subject of Sylvia's complaints to Nona, for now that her former friend had fallen under her displeasure all her charms vanished in thin air, and this, too, altered Sylvia's attitude toward Randolph Harwood when she considered his relations to Nona. She had been perfectly willing that Nona should be set aside while Ethel held sway, but now Ethel was not good enough for him; "she was insincere, selfish and would flirt with anyone," so Sylvia declared. "To tell you the truth,

Nona," she said, "there never was anything at all in that affair with Mr. Harwood. Ethel knew him when she was a school girl; he was one of her admirers up to the time he went to college, but after his freshman year I don't believe he even took the trouble to call upon her. All those photographs she has were taken at that time; I wish you could have seen her trying to win him back, not because she was in love with him but because she cannot bear that any man should prefer another girl to herself. It was so apparent that he couldn't help noticing, and though he did come here a good many times during that first visit of hers, it was because we made occasions for it, and since she was from his native town and was a stranger here he felt that he must show her some attention. This last time he called only once and then I specially invited him. He is really a very nice fellow and I would much rather you would marry him than that boy Julian who would take you away to the ends of the earth, maybe;" for Nona had assured Sylvia that there was little hope of Julian's settling in New York.

All this was not without its effect upon Nona,

and as the summer drew near it was a very usual thing for Mr. Harwood to drive or walk out to the farm where he was sure of a welcome from Mrs. Wilson and from Nona, too, for love will have its way and the girl had ceased to struggle against her feelings. "I am merely drifting, drifting, like those clouds," she said to herself one June day as she lay in the hammock swung under the trees. The air was sweet with the odor of roses and it was a happiness simply to live. Just a year before, Sylvia's marriage had taken place, and her husband, won by strategy, was still devoted. It was not an unhappy marriage, though not an ideal one. As for Emily and Bennett there was no mistaking the fact that they were made for each other, every one said. And so good had come of evil and no one had suffered greatly by Sylvia's piece of deceit. "I won't think about it," said the girl closing her eyes as if to shut away her thoughts.

Just then Thad came up with the mail. "Letters for you, Miss Nona," he said, handing her two envelopes.

She took them carelessly. One letter was

from Julian, the other from Margaret. The latter's was long and closely written. Nona had read but a few lines when she sat up and gave her whole attention to it. After a few preliminaries, Margaret wrote: "Now, Nona, dear, I have a most important piece of news to tell you. You may remember that I said that I would not allow myself to be carried away by any set of emotions roused by romantic surroundings; well, I haven't, for dear old Jim found me most prosaically employed when — but I'll tell you all about it. One day last week I went to Flo Owens's, who, by the way, is doing very well and has a cunning little house over in Brooklyn; it was on my S. E. day that I went over there to stay with Woofy and Posy and to keep house while Flo went out. She has no regular maid but some one comes in for a few hours every morning and she gets along very well. As I was a-saying — please excuse the long preamble — we were getting along famously, the bairnies and I, and I was ambitious enough to think I would have supper all ready when Flo came, so I had things sizzling on the stove, and some biscuits in the oven,

when suddenly there was a drip, drip, drip from overhead, and looking up I saw the ceiling was all wet and that something was wrong in the bathroom. So up I rushed and found that one of those little mischiefs had stuffed the holes in the stationary wash-basin, had filled it with water to sail pea-pod boats in and it was overflowing and underflowing and doing all sorts of things. I rushed around with mops and brooms and anything I could lay my hands on, but still it kept coming through, and I was fairly wading around the kitchen. Posy began to cry and Woofy wanted to know if we'd have to build an ark and where would we get the animals, when presently there came a ring at the door. I sent Posy to answer it and who should she bring out into the kitchen and into all that chaos but Jim.

"'Oh Jim,' I cried, 'I am so glad to see you. What shall I do? I am afraid the ceiling will fall, and oh dear, the water won't stop, and what shall we do?'"

"'I'll turn off the water in the cellar first,' he said. 'Where is the cellar door?' I showed him and down he went, and then he rushed up

to the bathroom and in a few minutes the overflow stopped and I was so relieved that I almost cried, and then I remembered my biscuits burning up in the oven and I rushed to them, Jim following. He turned in and helped me mop up the floor and he set the potatoes back so they wouldn't blacken to a crisp, and he unstopped the washstand and set everything to rights so quickly, joking and laughing all the time, so that it just came over me what a dear fellow he was and how fine it would be to have him at hand in emergencies, so I spoke right out and said: 'Oh, Jim, I wish I could always have you around when I get into trouble,' and he said: 'You can, Margie, if you'll have me; I'd ask nothing better,' and I just let him take me in his arms and so — and so — that's all.

"He knew that I was going over to Flo's and he came to take me home, knowing I'd either get swallowed up in the six o'clock crowd or that I would be out alone later than I ought. He is the dearest thing, I can't tell you, now that I have found out his serious side, how dear, but I will spare you further rhapsodies. There is no talk

of our marrying yet. I am happy and so is Jim, and the rest can wait."

There was more, but it was not of such great importance as this first news, though one little item at the end made Nona smile. "Julian was here last Sunday and met George Ewing. He thinks she is lovely, and says she reminds him of you. Does your throne feel unsteady? How would it do to ask her to visit me at Fairington this summer?"

Julian's letter was frank and boyish. He hoped Nona would not fail to come to Fairington. He had met Miss Ewing and she was fine, but he was always and forever true to Nona and was her faithful Julian.

Nona went in to find her grandmother. "Such a piece of news," she said. "Margie and Jim are engaged at last. He has been devoted to her for three years but she would never give in, though now she has. I am so glad, for I was afraid she might marry that smooth little Italian or that wild-haired Hungarian or some one as queer. She used to say that it was so commonplace to care for Jim, and talked of Italian skies

and of Bohemian life till it scared me sometimes, for I didn't know but that she'd elope."

"She has too much good sense to do such a foolish thing," said Mrs. Wilson.

"Yes, so it is proved. She is quite practical in some ways, yet very romantic in others, and I have never been quite sure which side would win. I must read you her account of how it all came about; it is so like Margie; she writes just as she talks." She read a few pages of the letter and then returned it to its envelope. "The little children she tells of are Rufus and Rosalie Owens, but we always call them by the names they give each other." "I had a letter from Julian, too," she added after a pause.

"Any special news from him?"

"No, he wants me to be sure to go to Fairington this summer."

"Do you want to go?"

"I don't know; I can't tell yet. Maybe I will conclude that I would rather stay here with my grandy."

"You mustn't do that if you want to go."

"I'd like to see Margie and hear all about

things, but if I go, I'll not stay long, not more than a week, I think; I'll not decide yet. I'm glad Margie isn't to be married just yet; I shall feel quite out of the way when she and Ada marry." She sat pensively looking out of the window, her elbows on the sill. Her grandmother watched her.

"I'd hate to have you leave me, Nona, just as I have you to myself," she said wistfully.

The girl turned, smiling. "No fear of that, grandy. You are likely to have me always."

"What would Julian say to that?"

"He would have no right to say anything."

"Well, you can afford to wait some years yet, Nona; you are barely nineteen."

"I realize that, although I feel much older sometimes. Margie is twenty and Sylvia was just her age when she married. I am not pining, I assure you, grandy. Life is very pleasant, even if my friends do get married. I love this old place more and more, and I don't miss my childhood's home half so much when I am here, for this was where my mother lived when she was my age."

"And it will be yours after I am gone."

"I hope that will be many, many years from now."

"I should like to see you happily married before I go, but I do not want to lose you from my side; I should like this to be your home and your children's. I should like to leave you all here, knowing you loved the old home as I do. There, Nona, I am getting too sentimental. Do go shoo those chickens out of the front garden; there must be a loose paling somewhere. Tell Thad to find it and mend it right away."

Nona went out again into the garden. How sweet the scent of roses and blooming borders made the air. "It is a dear old place," the girl murmured; "I shall probably live here always, and when I am an old, old woman with neither husband, chick nor child, I'll have Margie's children come to see me; I'll have house parties for them as grandma had for me. I wonder if I shall be queer and cranky and 'sot in my ways' as Mammy True says." She went slowly down the walk and after dislodging the intrusive chickens she hunted up Thad and then

went on to her favorite seat in a little niche formed by the roots of two trees which grew close together. Taking out her letters she read them over again, and with them spread out upon her lap she was absorbed in their contents when Mr. Harwood's voice interrupted her.

"Ah, Miss Nona, your grandmother said she thought I might find you here; she says you have a piece of news for me, so you see how speedily my curiosity brought me out to get it. May I sit down here? What a nice cozy place."

"Yes, isn't it? Can you find a comfortable root?"

"Oh yes, I'll take the hollow next yours, if I may."

"The news," said Nona, spreading out her letter, "is that Margie and Jim are engaged. It isn't very startling, for everyone expected it. It is an odd fact that when it is perfectly obvious to outsiders that two persons are in love with each other they expect everyone to be surprised when their engagement is announced."

"So you are not surprised. Are you pleased?"

"Yes, very much so. I had a letter from Julian, too."

Mr. Harwood did not make an immediate response. He seemed absorbed in picking up the little buds which had fallen from the tree overhead. After a pause he said, a little unsteadily, "You have nothing to announce in Julian's direction?"

"No, what could I have?"

"Your own engagement to him?"

"Mine? Oh, no, we are good friends; we always have been and shall always continue to be."

"That and nothing more?"

"That and nothing more, to the end of the chapter."

"And you consider me your friend, too?"

"You have said so."

"But I am not, Nona; I am not that alone. I am your lover."

Nona gave a quick little gasp and sat very still, but made no answer.

"I have many times meant to tell you so," Mr. Harwood went on, "but I have been very

dubious of how you would take it. You have been sometimes so exceedingly cold and distant, so indifferent; you have seemed almost to hate me at times and have avoided me on many occasions, but of late you have been kinder, and to-day I told myself that I would keep silence no longer, that I would offer you my love to take or reject, as you please. Will you take it, Nona? Will you marry me?"

The lips were quivering that said "No." There was a short silence and then Nona gathered strength to go on. "You know, Mr. Harwood, that it could never be. You know why. You have been very considerate and have never alluded to that old barrier between us, but it still exists; it will always exist. You might think you trusted me, that you believed in me, but if occasion came for distrust would you be able to turn to me and say: I know you are not capable of deceit? And even if you were noble enough to say nothing of what you felt, I should feel your distrust, and I could not bear it. Don't you see? Don't you see how impossible it is?"

"Nona, Nona," the man groaned, "can we

never bury that old trouble? I am willing to ignore it. I have shut it out of my thoughts. I will forget it."

"You cannot. You may try, but it will come again and again. You will not be able to lay its ghost; it would always rise between us. I appreciate your willingness to forget. I am grateful that you love me in spite of it, but there it is and it will haunt us forever. Can't you see that I am right?"

"I can see nothing but your dear face, your sweet eyes. I am blind to everything but that I love you. I am blind to all your childish folly, your little foolish faults. Why should I charge them against you? I have my faults, too. Ah, Nona, at your very worst you are far better than I. Ah, my dear, I love you so, can't you love me a little?"

"It isn't a question of loving," said Nona, very pale; "it is a question of a lifelong companionship that must have absolute faith and respect for its basis."

"I give you both, dear Benona. Ah, how I love that quaint little name by which your grand-

mother sometimes calls you. It is yours alone; no one else owns it, and it is so very dear to me."

That despised name. Nona smiled faintly. She had always disliked it, and he loved it because it was hers alone. It was hard, hard to put all this aside.

"I give you love, respect, admiration," repeated Mr. Harwood.

"But not absolute faith."

"Why insist?" he said almost impatiently. "That, too; yes, that too."

"If you can, but you cannot; I know you cannot. I know how you regard such things, and some day, if it came to a question of believing or disbelieving some one thing in which I was concerned, you could not believe. I know it; oh, I know it. That is why I have struggled all along, for I will tell you the truth, I have struggled to avoid you, not to care; and when I knew, when they told me that you cared for Ethel Patterson I set my face against you; it was then I avoided you. I will be frank and tell you that I did try to dislike you; I wanted to."

"But you knew it could not be she whom I loved."

"How could I know?"

"Did I alter my manner toward you? Didn't you guess long ago that I loved you, Nona? Last summer on the bridge, didn't you know then?"

"I tried not to think so."

"I was a very boyish admirer of Ethel's. I used to carry her books to and from school for her. I danced with her at dancing school. I did the little foolish things a lad of sixteen does, and there the whole affair stopped. She could never touch my heart, Nona, you must have known that. But you — Oh, my little girl, you have confessed that you have struggled not to care, don't struggle any longer, for Nona, dear little Nona, I swear to you that you are my only love and unless I win you no other shall ever take your place."

Nona raised her hand as if to ward him away. "No, no," she said faintly. "It cannot be. I should simply be storing up unhappiness for us both. Let this be the end. It must always be no."

Then came a light voice upon the air. "Nona, Nona, where are you?"

Nona sprang to her feet. "Sylvia!" she cried running toward her sister. "I was over there, over there under the tree," she said in an agitated voice. "Mr. Harwood is there. Will you come over, or go back to the house?"

Sylvia looked at her curiously. "Why, Nona, your hands are as cold as ice and you are so pale. Aren't you well, dear?"

"Never mind, I — I —. Come, let us go to the house. I have a piece of news for you. Come, Mr. Harwood," she called without looking back. He arose and followed a little behind them. He, too, was very pale. "I must show you Margie's letter," said Nona, linking her arm in her sister's, "and, oh yes, I have a letter from Julian, too. What is your news, Sylvia?" She talked fast till a red spot burned in each cheek.

Mrs. Wilson, sitting on the porch, was joined by Mr. Harwood, while Nona took her sister up-stairs. She was glad that Margaret's letter gave her an excuse to talk about something outside her own affairs, but Sylvia did not forget her paleness, nor the cold trembling hands. She listened to Margaret's letter and commented

upon it as Nona would have had her, then she took Nona's face between her hands and kissed it. "Something troubles you, dear, what is it?" she asked. "You looked so strange as I came up, and Mr. Harwood, too, was pale. Did I interrupt a — a — anything, Nona? Tell me, little sister, is anything wrong?" And Nona flung her arms around her sister's neck and sobbed out her heart with her head on Sylvia's shoulder.

"Why, my dear, my dear," said Sylvia, "You love him? You have refused him? What does it mean?"

"I can't tell, I can't, Sylvia; it is all over. It can never, never be, that is all. I am not heart-broken, don't think it, dear. Go down and try to excuse me to grandma and let me have it out by myself. I didn't intend you nor anybody should ever know. I'll be all right after a while." And Sylvia kissed and embraced her and then left her.

CHAPTER XIX

CONFESSIONS

When Sylvia reached the porch she found that Mr. Harwood had gone inside and that he was standing by the piano. He had accepted Mrs. Wilson's invitation to stay to tea, upon his first coming, and was wondering how he could gracefully retreat. "Nona will be down in a little while," said Sylvia composedly. "Where is grandma?"

"She was called to look after something by her faithful henchman, Thad."

"Thad is a great institution," Sylvia returned. "He used always to drive for grandpa when he made his professional rounds, and he still thinks the old office a spot to be venerated. The doctor's buggy he considers sacred; it is such a funny, roomy old affair, though it serves a good purpose sometimes. When did you see the Duvalls, Mr. Harwood, or rather, when did you

see Emily? You see Bennett every day, of course."

"I see Mrs. Duvall nearly every day. They are about as happy a pair as one could meet."

Sylvia laughed. "They ought to thank me for that," she said.

Mr. Harwood looked at her with a sudden lighting up of his face. "Mrs. Waters, what do you mean?" he asked.

"Oh nothing," replied Sylvia lightly, though looking somewhat confused. "I helped on that affair a little, that's all. One must do those things sometimes for a friend, you know. It really wasn't anything to speak of. I have always been glad I did it, though."

"Mrs. Waters, I beg of you, I implore you to be frank with me and tell me what it was you did." He strode up to her and fixed an earnest, intense gaze upon her.

"Oh, but I can't," she said smiling and stepping back a little. "I promised I wouldn't."

"You will tell me whom you promised, you will do that?"

"Yes, I can tell that. How judicially you look

at me. Oh, Mr. Harwood — " A sudden lovely color dyed her face. " Is it — has it anything to do with you and Nona? Oh, has it? "

" Mrs. Waters, there must be nothing but the solemn truth between us in this matter. Please tell me, as you would help a suffering man, whom did you promise? "

She looked at him, at the set tense face, pale with emotion, and realized that here truly was a suffering man. " It was Nona," she said in a whisper.

He clenched his hand hard. " You said just now that one must do things sometimes to help a friend, will you tell me all that implies, for my sake, and for — Nona's? "

" For Nona's? Is it — Oh, no, she cannot have such overstrained notions of duty. Will you explain yourself a little more clearly? I don't quite know what it is I am to tell."

He made a little gesture of despair. " We must not be interrupted," he said. " I think we had better go down where you found us today, if you do not object."

Sylvia laughed. " It certainly is becoming a

matter of momentous import; you are sure you have no witnesses secreted in that hollow tree, Mr. Harwood?"

He made no reply, but followed her down to the old tree and she seated herself in a picturesque attitude, never forgetting to be becomingly posed. "Now go on," she said.

He took a position against a tree opposite, leaning back with folded arms. "There was a letter," he said; "it was sent to Mrs. Duvall before her marriage; it purported to be from Bennett. Owing to the contents of that letter the two became engaged. I saw the document and, more from professional curiosity than anything else, I tried to trace it. Circumstances pointed to your sister as the writer; the paper used was such as she always uses and she has never denied that it was her work. In fact, she has always led me to believe that it was hers. Because of that letter, to-day she rejected me. If she did not write it —" He paused and made a gesture of entreaty.

"Because of the letter she rejected you? I don't understand," said Sylvia wonderingly.

"Must I be more explicit? Then, because she feels that I must always believe that she was guilty of a forgery she argues that there could never be perfect trust and faith on my part, and that I would feel even an unexpressed distrust of her."

Sylvia covered her face with her hands. "Oh my poor little Nona," she murmured, "why are you so given to heroics? All this time she has carried the burden for me," she said springing to her feet, all self-consciousness gone, and a real, devoted love shining in her face. "You need distrust her no longer," she said. "It was I who wrote the letter, and all this time Nona has borne the blame. I took a sheet of her paper because it seemed more suitable than mine. Nona discovered it and begged me never to tell."

"Ah!" Mr. Harwood drew a long breath.

"I didn't think it was such a dreadful thing to do," said Sylvia wistfully. "I think it was a little overstrained for Nona to make such a mountain of it, for it has made two people, indeed, four, very happy."

"And two very miserable," Mr. Harwood could not refrain from saying.

The tears sprang to Sylvia's lovely eyes. "I didn't know it would," she made excuse. "I am sorry, very sorry, Mr. Harwood. If Nona had only told me that she was carrying the blame of it, I never would have allowed her to do it."

"She has the devoted spirit of the early martyrs," said Mr. Harwood in an exultant tone. "What courage, what a heart of gold she has. What other woman would have locked the secret so safely for the sake of the love she bore a sister?"

"Oh, the dear brave little soul! The dear loving little heart," said Sylvia, grieved at the trouble she had caused, but yet complacently satisfied with this proof of Nona's love for her. "Has — Has Emily the letter now?" she asked hesitatingly.

"No, that identical one no longer exists. Bennett copied it and gave his wife the true letter because he could not bear that she should set any value on a forgery. He knows nothing about the matter beyond the fact that such a letter was written by someone. It is our secret, yours and Nona's and mine. No one shall ever know but ourselves. I give you my word of honor."

"I know I can trust you," said Sylvia, a little uneasy to see how seriously the matter was regarded. "Please forgive me for making you unhappy, Mr. Harwood," she added.

She looked so fair and wistful and beseeching that it was not in his heart to harbor resentment. Could he do less than forgive Nona's sister, when Nona's love had been so great and so unselfish? She had endured silently all this time, for Sylvia's sake, the pain of suspicion, the pangs of hopeless love, perhaps. "Please forgive me," repeated Sylvia, and then with a little wistful smile she added, "for Nona's sake."

"I do forgive you, if I am the one to forgive," he said, "but I think I am scarcely less a sinner, for I should have known, I should have known."

"That she could not do such a thing? Yes, I suppose it was very wicked, but I can't seem to feel that it was, and I don't believe I regret anything except that I have made Nona unhappy. I will go and send her to you, shall I, Mr. Harwood?"

"If she will come. I do not deserve that she should. I should serve years for her."

"But she will come," said Sylvia with a reassuring nod.

He watched her white frock as she flitted between the long rows of box and then the thick embowering trees hid her from sight.

Sylvia ran up to Nona's room, knocking peremptorily. A pale serious little face with eyes heavy with tears, was raised as she entered. "Nona, Nona," cried Sylvia, "oh you poor darling, all this time you have been unhappy. Why did you do it, dear? For me? I know, but you shouldn't have. Oh, Nona, I know it all. I know all about it, and how you have taken the blame. Oh, you sweet little Nona, how could you do it for this mean old sister of yours? But I told him, Nona. I 'fessed; I had to, and it was right that I should, and even if it hadn't been right I would have done it, for I couldn't have helped myself, he looked at me so, as if he would see into my very soul. What a stern judge he will make if he ever rises to such a position. I should be afraid of him if I were a criminal."

A criminal! Nona shuddered, then she took Sylvia in her arms and kissed her over and over

again. "He shall not think harsh things of you, dear; he shall not," she said.

"Oh, he doesn't," returned Sylvia lightly. "He was very nice, and forgave me very sweetly, and it is all right. Will you go down and see him, dear? He is so unhappy and he is waiting for you under the tree where you were sitting when I came. Kiss me, you dear, dear child. How much you must love me, Nona, to take all the blame and make yourself so miserable."

"I do love you," said Nona, kissing her and holding her very close.

"And I love you," returned Sylvia. "Nobody ever had such a sweet, good sister. Now, run along, I'll keep grandma entertained while you have your talk out."

Nona went slowly down the walk toward the big trees. Mr. Harwood was still standing there, one hand pressed over his eyes. He did not see nor hear her approach, and for a few minutes she stood looking at him, in the fullness of her heart, glorying in her right to give him her abundant love, and yet hesitating to speak the

word which should bring her to her own. At last she said in a soft voice: "Sylvia sent me."

He started, and his hand dropped to his side but he made no movement toward her. "Oh, sweet saint," he said, "I am humbled in the dust. How dared I, in my arrogance, to do you such wrong? I should have obeyed only the promptings of my own heart which never let me believe you guilty of the smallest deceit. What were reason, proofs, or anything compared to that insistent voice which would never let me think you anything but what you are, the noblest, loveliest woman God ever made. I am not worthy so much as to touch your hand. I cannot ask for your love; I ask only for your forgiveness."

Still he did not move, but Nona came a step nearer. "You could not know," she said. "I allowed you to believe as you did. Anyone would have done the same."

"Not if they had read you aright. I should have believed in you in spite of the whole world. Will you, oh sweet saint, will you forgive me?"

"I am no saint," said Nona. "I am only a very human person, a girl who makes many mis-

takes and, please don't talk of forgiveness; of course I forgive you what you were made to believe."

"I can never again aspire to anything but your friendship," said her lover still very humble. "Will you let me be your friend still in spite of all?"

"Yes," said Nona softly, going still nearer to him. "But you said — you know, you said you were something else." She hung her head and looked up at him with a shy glance.

"Nona! Do you mean that you care for me? How can such a saint love such a sinner?"

"But I do," said Nona, scarcely above a whisper. And the last barrier was swept away.

Sylvia was rocking back and forth in one of the big porch chairs when the two made their appearance. She sprang up and went to meet them with outstretched hands. "Well," she said gaily, "is it all right?"

Nona laid her hands in her sister's. "It is all right, beautifully right," she said. "Where is grandma? I must see her."

"She has just come in from the barn-yard and

is in the office looking over some accounts or seeds or something."

"I will find her."

"And I must go home or my big boy will be fretting for me. I suppose no power on earth would drag you away, Mr. Harwood. It seems that I shall have to call you brother Randolph some day."

"It is almost too good to believe, but it is true that it is the prospect. I will see you to your carriage, Mrs. Waters; your man is coming now." He watched her drive away, so gay and light-hearted, scarcely realizing the unhappiness of which she had been the cause, and, now that she had made her confession, quite carefree and happy. Beautiful, lovable, and beloved, yet there were no deep soundings to her nature, and of high principles she had small comprehension.

In a few minutes Mrs. Wilson appeared with Nona. "So you are going to rob me of my little girl," she said. "Aren't you very ungrateful, Mr. Harwood?" But she smiled as she spoke and he knew she was not ill-pleased.

"I shall not take her very far, and she will not have to go till she is quite ready to leave you," he made reply.

"Why need she go at all," said Mrs. Wilson. "I think it would be much better for you both to make your home with me."

"Should you like that, Nona?" asked her lover.

"Better than anything," she answered.

"The house is big enough," said Mrs. Wilson, "and if we quarrel we can get as far away from each other as we like, and grumble all we choose without disturbing anyone."

Mr. Harwood laughed. "I hope there will be no quarrelings or grumblings."

"You don't know me yet," replied Mrs. Wilson shaking her head. "I am afraid I am rather masterful, but as I grow older I am a little more ready to drop the reins and to desire peace, so perhaps I shall become a tolerable housemate in time."

"You are now," declared Nona stoutly. "You are much less prickly, grandy dear, and I think we shall be a model household."

"And this is the girl that declared to me this morning that she would never marry," said Mrs. Wilson with a smile. "How did you happen to change your mind so suddenly?"

"The cause is not very far off," said Nona with a happy little smile. "It never rains but it pours, you know, grandy, and perhaps Margie's example was too much for me."

"You are sure you will not mind coming out here?" Mrs. Wilson asked Mr. Harwood anxiously. "It is something of a journey to take every day."

"Not a bit of it. What is a journey of two miles? And the peace and restfulness that one gets here are worth more than the distance. I have always maintained that it is a good thing for a man to get as far away from his office as possible when he wants to rest, and I shall enjoy it here."

"But when there is anything going 'on in town and you want to stay in late, what then? You see I am showing you all the disadvantages so that you may know what to expect."

"What did you do when you were first married, Mrs. Wilson?"

"Oh, you know the doctor had his office here, and it was not often that he could take the time to go about in the evenings with me, but sometimes we did go together and it was a treat to me."

"If time were a consideration Nona could meet me in town and we could do our junketing without difficulty; if there were plenty of time two miles is a mere step, not half as far as most persons in New York have to go. Don't trouble yourself, my dear Mrs. Wilson; we shall get all the fun we want without working too hard for it, I'll venture to say."

Whatever the household might be in the future it was a happy one that night. So many dreams were coming true. Mrs. Wilson, at one end of the porch, rocked back and forth, her thoughts straying back over past years and forward to those which were to come, and she was peacefully content. At the other sat Nona and her lover talking in low murmurs, the rose petals softly drifting down upon their heads.

"You frighten me when you put me on such a high pedestal," Nona said. "I am afraid I shall

never be able to keep my place there. I am by no means perfect. I am often saucy to grandma and I have inherited her tenacity of opinion. Sylvia thinks I am very opinionated. You will be disappointed if you think you are going to marry an angel. I have many faults."

"Who has not, darling? I am glad you have, or else I should think that we two, saint and sinner, would be too unequally yoked and that you would be made unhappy by the contrast. I am not afraid to face the future with you, dear Benona, dearest Benona. Do you remember a June night a year ago? I think I loved you then." And in such fond and foolish talk they spent their evening. There were shadows ahead but they could not see them; there were burdens to be borne and griefs to enter their home but now there was nothing but love and the light of a great happiness.

When her lover had gone Nona went over to her grandmother and knelt beside her. "Oh, grandma dear," she whispered, "were you once as happy as I?"

"Yes, dear child, and the memory of that I

can never lose. What we have had cannot be taken from us and though your grandfather and your dear mother are to-night in Paradise they are mine still and when I follow I shall find them. I am happy, too, child, for my dream will come true and this will be your home always. I shall not be left to a lonely old age."

The next day a long letter was written to Margie whose surprise in this case would be greater than Nona's had been when Margaret told of her engagement. Nona's letter was more reserved than Margaret's had been, for it was not Nona's way to enter into details where she felt deeply. She made no promise about the visit to Fairington, but she did advise Margaret to urge George Ewing to make her a visit, and then she smiled to herself. "I am afraid that is to ease my conscience," she said. "I don't want Julian to miss me and I do want him to marry a girl like George. I hope he will fall in love seriously, and I believe I had better keep out of the way. Perhaps Margie will come here for a visit. I will ask her, for that would please grandma much better than to have me go there.

I must go to see mamma. I have neglected her shamefully, and she will be glad and interested to know my news. Ah me! did I dream this time yesterday that I should be so blissfully happy to-day?"

She went down to find her grandmother, when she had finished her letters. "I think it would be kinder if I were to go to Baltimore and tell mamma my news," she said. "Can you spare me a day, grandy? And instead of going to Fairington, don't you think it would be pleasanter for us to have Margie here for a little visit? I want to see her, and yet I think I'd rather not go to Fairington."

"On Julian's account, I suppose. He'll not pine away and fill an early grave on your account, Nona. Don't flatter yourself."

"I don't," returned Nona, "but I think it would be better not to go, don't you, honestly now?"

"Honestly, yes, and I am sure I don't want you to go, and perhaps you are right to announce your engagement to Mrs. Martin in person. You can go up any day you like."

"Then I'll go soon and get it over." She was as good as her word and made her visit the very next day. Mrs. Martin received her affectionately and listened with great interest to what she had to tell.

"I am sure I am much pleased," she said. "I feel now that your future is secure and that you are both well settled. I am sure your poor father would be gratified. You must let me help you out with your trousseau, Nona, and whenever you want to do any shopping you must come right here and make my home your headquarters. And you are really going to live at your grandmother's? How will Mr. Harwood like that?"

"He likes it. He and grandma are great friends. She respects him and he always seems able to smooth away her sharp speeches so that they don't have any effect. She ought not to be left alone at her age."

"That is quite true, and I suppose she will leave you the homestead, for you were always her favorite. I am sure, Nona, I am much gratified that you are making so good a match. Mr. Harwood is really a superior man to Graham

Waters." She looked at Nona as if she wondered a little how she had managed it, and why Sylvia's beauty had not won the prize. "Mr. Martin says that Mr. Harwood is a rising young lawyer and that he will make his mark. You really are doing very well, Nona. I am quite pleased."

Having discharged her duty Nona did not feel called upon to prolong her stay and took her leave with a sense of relief. There had never been much sympathy between herself and her stepmother, and though Nona gave her a certain respect there was no great affection. She was glad, too, to leave the hot dusty city and to get back into the rose-embowered old farm-house. She found her grandmother was not alone but that Emily Duvall was on the porch waiting to see her. "I couldn't wait," said Emily. "Bennett told me when he came in to dinner that Randolph was walking on air and that he never saw a person so changed, and so I had to come right out with my good wishes in my hand. I am so glad, Nona. Randolph is such a good fellow; I wish you could hear Bennett on the subject,

and it is so nice that it is you that he is going to marry; you are just the wife for him and I don't know a girl that either Bennett or I would be more pleased to see him marry. Do you remember the night of the concert? I thought then that he admired you, even when he was so dreadfully non-committal."

"Yes, and you warned me not to fall in love with him," returned Nona smiling.

"So I did. I told you he would never be a spontaneous lover, but I take it all back. I have no doubt but that he is eloquence itself and that he is, moreover, everything he ought to be and that you are perfectly satisfied."

"I am," Nona replied, "and I wouldn't have him changed in any particular."

"That's what I say of Bennett," returned Emily laughing; "he is Bennett and that is enough. Is it to be soon, Nona?"

"No, indeed, not for a year at least. Grandma thinks I am still rather young and I am in no hurry. If we had to be separated or there were any reason for a short engagement I'd say nothing, but as it is I would rather wait."

"Well, I wish you may be as happy as I am, and that is wishing you a great deal. Bennett said he would come for me and I think that is he now."

Bennett's good wishes, if more clumsily given, were none the less sincere, and in his praise of Randolph he waxed fairly eloquent so that Nona felt that upon the loyalty of these two friends she could always depend.

CHAPTER XX

TRAILING ARBUTUS

Margaret gladly accepted Nona's invitation to make a little visit at the farm, for the news of Nona's engagement, immediately following her own, made her eager to see her cousin and talk it all over. She arrived one evening early in July, all excitement, and fairly danced up and down when she grabbed Nona, who came to meet her. "It seemed as if I would never get here," she exclaimed. "Oh, Nona, isn't it funny? And oh, you sly thing, why didn't you tell me something of all this before?"

"There wasn't anything to tell," Nona returned. "You must have known how I felt or you wouldn't have taken up the cudgels so bravely at Sylvia's when Miss Patterson was there. You were right about her, Margie; there

never was anything at all in the affair between her and Randolph."

Margaret laughed gleefully. "I wonder how she liked the news of your engagement. I can't help being very spiteful whenever I think of her, Nona, so don't look so virtuously reproachful. When are you going to be married and where are you going to live?"

"We will live with grandma. Dear grandy, she has softened wonderfully this last year, and I feel that we all misunderstood her when we were children. She says as she grows older that she finds it is not worth while to fight everybody. She and Randolph have always been such good friends and he agrees with me that it would not be right for me to leave her alone, and so the mountain will come to Mahomet."

"How funny it is to hear you call him Randolph. Do you really dare to do it to his face?"

"Of course, silly girl, why shouldn't I?"

"Oh, he always seemed so stand-offish and dignified."

"Wait till you know him better," laughed Nona. "He can be as boyish and full of fun as anybody."

"He didn't exhibit much humor there in Fairington last summer."

"No wonder," Nona gave a little sigh; "we were going through our hardest trials just then; there were misunderstandings and things and it didn't seem as if it ever could be all right. He wanted to come down with me to meet you, but I wouldn't let him, for I wanted to have you all to myself this first hour. He will be out this evening. Now tell me about Jim."

"He is the same blessed old dear. What a ninny I was not to discover how good and reliable he is. We are going to marry in the fall, Nona, for I hate to have him endure life in a New York boarding house any longer than necessary. There is no semblance of a home about it, and he does so long for a home, so we are going to take a little house somewhere, either in Brooklyn or Harlem or some suburban town, and he shall have a home then if I can make it for him."

"And if there is any trouble with the pipes," laughed Nona, "he will know what to do."

Margaret laughed too. "That was really a

lucky overflow, and it didn't do much damage since it was stopped in time. You are to be sure to hold yourself in readiness for the wedding, Nona. We have arranged it all. You are to be maid of honor, and Ada and George Ewing bridesmaids. We are going to be married in Fairington in the little old church. I'd so much rather have it so, and so would Jim."

"I shall be married in church, too," said Nona, "in the same church in which my mother was married. We did think of a home wedding, but I think it seems a little more solemn and suitable to be married in church when one can. I shall be in no hurry, Margie; it will be a year, at least, before I begin to think of it."

"Poor Julian," sighed Margaret in mock sympathy.

"Poor Julian, indeed! I'll venture to say before the summer is over he will be tagging George Ewing everywhere, and I hope he will."

"So do I, since you won't have him, and I shouldn't wonder if your predictions would come true. Julian is not one to pine on the stem, and if he can't get pudding he will take pie. George

would be just the girl for him and, strange to say, she was much taken with him, for she doesn't usually care a snap about men. I have never known her to fancy anyone very much."

"Then do invite her to Fairington this summer."

"Oh, I have already, and she is coming as soon as I go back. Julian has promised to play my wedding march, and I want to feel that I have all the friends that I love best around me to help me make my start in life. I tell you, Nona," she went on quite seriously, "when a girl really loves a man for his true worth, she doesn't take marriage lightly. I think I owe you and George Ewing a great deal, for you are both so unwavering in your principles and you have made me see the reality of things, the serious side of life. Ah, there is the dear old white house, and Mrs. Wilson has actually come all the way to the first gate. Let me get out, Nona, and walk up to the house with her, and you can drive around to the stable."

Short though Margaret's visit was, it was long enough for her to recognize many qualities in

Randolph Harwood which she had not seen before, and she went away quite satisfied with Nona's choice. When Nona next went to Fairington it was in October when Margaret was married. On this occasion Julian confided to Nona that he had serious intentions of asking Miss Ewing to marry him, and that it was all because she was more like Nona than any girl he had met, and what did Nona think about it.

"She is just the girl for you," said Nona heartily.

"You see," said Julian, "if it hadn't been for you I should very likely have married some girl just because she was pretty and had cunning little ways, but somehow since I have seen you I can't stand silly girls any more. Oh, I tell you, Nona, it was a pretty hard pull for me after I heard you were going to marry Ran, but you know I had promised you I'd not go under and I knew you would want me to brace up and I did, and now you will be my cousin and my friend always, won't you?"

"Always," returned Nona, "and I like George so much that I shall want to be her friend always,

too. I wish you luck in that direction, Julian." And as future years proved, it was luck and the very best of it for Julian.

But it was not in one year that Nona's wedding day came, for from Margaret's wedding she returned home to welcome the arrival of Sylvia's first-born whose little life on earth lasted but six short months. The baby had been such a dear delight to both sisters, Nona had stood god-mother to her little niece and had delighted to set stitches in the pretty dainty garments the little one wore. She had begged that the child might be spared the possession of her name, but Sylvia would have no other, saying it was a dear one to her and that if she thought it sweet and quaint and if Randolph loved it, Nona should not object. When the little life went out Nona was almost as much grief-stricken as her sister, and even in after years the memory of the fair little waxen face would bring tears to her eyes. It was a long time before either she or Sylvia could think of merry-making and Randolph had agreed to whatever was Nona's wish in the matter of their marriage. He was a great comfort to her

in these days of sorrow, and so was Mrs. Wilson. If Sylvia had ever doubted her grandmother's affection before she did not then, for there never was a readier comforter.

"My own first-born, too, was taken," she said to the mourning mother, and Sylvia turned to her as to no one else, for she felt that here was one who could understand her grief. At her grandmother's suggestion she made ready to go to the farm-house to hide herself and her sorrow, and to shut herself away from the too painful associations which her own home brought her. Graham, dazed and helpless under the blow, was willing to do anything that would bring comfort to Sylvia and, therefore, for three or four months they dwelt under Mrs. Wilson's roof until summer came and then Graham took his wife North to a more invigorating climate.

Nona and her grandmother spent a quiet summer together, and toward the close of it, seeing that Nona drooped under the heat, not having rallied from the pain and shock of her grief, Mrs. Wilson proposed that they, too, should take a little journey, the first for her in many years.

And so they started off to Boston, and being so pleased with her travels that she was not ready to go home in the time she had set, Mrs. Wilson insisted upon extending the trip and they had gone as far as Canada before they thought of turning their faces homeward. The experience greatly brightened the two, and when she did at last come back, Mrs. Wilson declared that she felt ten years younger.

"I think," said Nona, when the autumn days had come, "that I will make up my mind to be married in the spring, grandy, when the trailing arbutus comes. I shall carry some as my bridal flowers. It will be early spring when Easter comes and I think Easter week would do very well, don't you? It will be nearly two years then since we had the house-party, and I will be an April bride."

"I think that will do very well," Mrs. Wilson agreed; "it will give us something to interest and occupy us this coming winter. I must furbish up the old house a little."

"Not too much, grandy; I love the old things."

"You need not be afraid that I will do too much," Mrs. Wilson returned smiling, "for I

mean only to replenish what is worn out; things like carpets and curtains do not last forever. There comes your sweetheart, child; go talk to him about it. He has been very patient and I know what a joy it will be to him to have a day set."

Nona went out into the autumn sunshine. "What a bright beautiful day it is for November," she said as Mr. Harwood came up. "Don't you want to take a walk? I should like to talk over something with you."

He willingly acquiesced and they started off toward their favorite bit of woods. "And what did you want to tell me, Priscilla?" said Randolph as they entered the woods. "I hope it is that you have decided upon our wedding day. Is that it?"

"Yes," said Nona a little shyly, "that is just it. I think in the spring, during Easter week, we can decide upon, for then," she looked up at him with eyes full of tender memory, "I can have some trailing arbutus to carry."

"My dear little May-flower, I think it is just like you to want to do that."

"I remember the poor despised ones that came to me one Easter Day and I want to make up for not wearing those by showing the whole world how happy I am to carry the dear things as my wedding flowers. The first time you ever paid me any attention at all was when you sent me the flowers for the concert, do you remember?"

"I remember, sweetheart," he said tenderly. "I do not think I have forgotten anything concerning you that has happened since I first met you, and it is but another proof of your loveliness that you want to defy conventionality and are willing to forego the ordinary bridal bouquet and carry my May-flowers. Thank you, darling. I wonder if any other girl would have been so frankly honest as to confess why she wanted to carry those special flowers."

"Of course," returned Nona; "any girl who really loved the man she expected to marry would do the same."

"And you really love me?"

"Oh foolish, foolish man, how many times in this last year and a half have I told you?"

"Tell me now, once again, and add the climax to the happiness you have given me by letting me know that I shall not have to wait much longer for my wife."

Without hesitation she put her hands in his and looked up at him with sweetly serious eyes. "Dear, I love you with my whole heart," she said.

He drew her close to him. "And dearest, I love you as it seems to me no man could ever have loved before. You are so precious to me, my little girl, that I sometimes am amazed that such a wealth of good fortune should be mine. In half a year, Nona, only half a year, and you will be my own beloved wife, and every day will mean that it is a shorter time till then. I shall be like a school-boy who checks off the days till he goes home. I shall be going home to you then, Nona."

"You don't mean that you are going to carry a bunch of arbutus," said Sylvia when Nona told her the plans for her wedding; "they will hardly show and they are not pure white, and — oh, do carry roses, or lilies-of-the-valley might do, if you are bent upon spring flowers."

But Nona shook her head. "I'll carry nothing else," nor did she, and there was no great display at her wedding, though the church was decked with the Easter flowers and was crowded with her friends. George Ewing and Ada North were the only attendants. Sylvia, with a new expression upon her face, looked her best. Her little son, now two months old, was at the church door in Mammy True's arms, and to him the new Mrs. Randolph Harwood gave the first kiss. Mrs. Wilson, very dignified and stately, sat through the ceremony with head erect, though her lips twitched and her hands trembled, while Sylvia wept openly. All the dear friends were there, Margie and Jim happy and smiling, Maurice, soon to go through the same ceremony, Mr. and Mrs. Foster, Mrs. Martin, large, complacent and serene, with her husband. But Ethel Patterson was not there. She had recently become engaged to a German baron and had gone to Europe where she would be married. She was, perhaps, the only one who was not a well-wisher, and she never again would cross Nona's path.

The old farm-house opened its doors to all who

flocked thither to offer their good wishes. Mammy True and Aunt Hannah squabbled in the kitchen, but there was no dissension elsewhere. Sylvia clung to her sister and shed many tears as she took her leave. "How deeply she feels everything," whispered some one at her elbow, and Sylvia felt a little thrill of conscious pleasure as she heard the words. But she who felt most deeply had no tears in her bright eyes, yet her heart was very full. Her lips trembled, but her voice was steady as she wished her favorite granddaughter a happy journey, and gave her a last kiss.

"I am coming back, you know, dear grandy," said Nona, her eyes very moist.

In the quiet of the evening when they had left her all alone, the old lady sat rocking in her chair, the tears trickling down her cheeks. "May the good Lord spare her to me," she murmured. "Oh, my Heavenly Father, I could not bear it if she were taken from me as her mother was." But the promise of Eastertide was in the air, and presently she softly whispered: "Though he were dead, yet shall he live." Though it was

a mild day a fire burned upon the hearth, but the window was partly open letting in the smell of the brown earth from which were bursting into life the dull forms of bulbs hidden away all winter. Already the daffodils had pressed upward their green blades. On the table stood a bowl of trailing-arbutus whose faint odor told of a life which had developed in spite of cold and storm. She who sat there was comforted, and suddenly she felt that she was not alone; she was surrounded by children; the echo of childish voices sounded on her ear, the noise of little feet pattered up and down the stairs. They were no ghosts of the past, but the companions of the future, her great-grand-children who would console and comfort her. She sat a long time thinking, then she arose and lighted her lamp, murmuring: "I must have Sylvia bring the baby often," and though the echoing footsteps fled, so, too, did the dark thoughts and all was well.

OCT 2 1903

COPY DEL. TO CAT. DIV.
OCT. 2 1903

OCT. 5 1903

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
00021194438